

# **MONEY RAINING FROM HEAVEN?**

## **AN APPRAISSAL OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

### **IN A MISSIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

**BY**

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## **A SUMMARY**

**The constituent concepts of the gospel is not only vital for the correct understanding of the true meaning of Christ, but also for the appropriate meaning and practice of mission to enlarge the church of Christ in his service. The thesis researched the background of the Prosperity Gospel critically in addition to the use of it for missiological purposes to enlarge the church with the luring of poor people with the excessive promises of vast wealth after contributing to the Prosperity Churches generously and substantially from within their poverty.**

**The heart of the research was the analysis of ten sermons by prosperity preachers according to the “open coding” of the “Grounded Theory”, drawing conclusions from the practical analysis of the sermons, instead of the usual research working with the material from a pre-conceived theory. This approach uncovered and displayed the distortion and falsification of the true gospel. The thesis constructed an appropriate benchmark of the authentic gospel against which to measure deviations from the traditional gospel and mission according to this gospel.**

**The dissertation exposed courteously, but deliberately that the Prosperity Gospel was infiltrated with alienated concepts from unscriptural humanism, the “American materialistic dream” and the secular Rogerian psychology with its non-spiritual psychotherapeutic approach, as well as the “profane” preaching of Norman Vincent Peale, comprising “New Thought”, metaphysics, Christian Science, and medical and psychological practices. More serious was the specific “cultic” influences and teachings. Cultic here indicated a system of religious or spiritual beliefs, especially an informal and transient belief system regarded by the traditional churches as misguided, unorthodox, extremist, or even false, and directed by a charismatic,**

authoritarian leader. Ultimately, the Prosperity Gospel was contaminated with Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism and Unitarianism.

The thesis, however, is not negative about the overflowing blessings of God, also regarding temporal prosperity, but the research unearthed the true riches of the gospel of Christ in an exegetical scriptural manner and delineated it in an extensive way – money is indeed “raining from heaven”, but spiritually in a true gospel way, through prayer and in obedience to Christ, depending on faith in God. The norm was “abundance, but not accumulation of riches”. It is sad to have unmasked the fact that some prosperity preachers commanded the churches not to pray anymore, but to command the blessings of God “onto” the “true” believers towards accumulation of vast wealth (cf. “pastor” D O OYEDEPO).

The 10 sermons were thoroughly scrutinised and the main problems with the “claiming” of vast wealth according to the gospel brought out in the open – the lack of Christ-centred preaching, the absence of the emphasis of the work of the Holy spirit, the misunderstanding of the “revelation” history, the deficiency of scriptural exegesis and the unscriptural obsession with vast material wealth as a “blessing”. Usually only the prosperity preacher and a few supporters became the “blessed” rich from all the compromised donations of the “masses”.

This was followed by a development of the academic discipline of theology, indicating revelation as a historical process, where the gospel moved from survival to justice in the Old Testament, and finally to unconditional love and care according to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This was situated *vis-à-vis* an evaluation of the theology of the Prosperity Gospel, portraying the false concept of “faith”.

Towards the end of the thesis the perspective of the development of missiology was explained up to the contemporary point and an oversight of the concept of mission of the past century was outlined: It became clear that ecclesiology did not precede

missiology, but rather, *missiology precedes ecclesiology*, because a community of Christians did not first create a church and then developed its mission; a community of Christians participated in God's mission and thus constituted a church, according to the New Testament. This placed the preaching of the blessings of the gospel and the functioning of God's mission in true perspective.

As poverty is a vital concept regarding the preaching of the Prosperity Gospel the plight of the poor in all its shocking depths were exposed as a problem and a mission task for all the churches of Christ - approximately 15 million people in South Africa live in dire poverty without any hope of alleviation, and 1 billion people in the world live under the poverty datum line. This is a wake-up call for the church of Christ, *existing for God's mission*, to face this challenge of mission to the poor.

The research closed with a summary of the mission task to the poor.

The dissertation concluded with a delineation of possible further topics in this field to be studied.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

#### INTRODUCTION:

The quest of the thesis was the figure of speech or metaphor: “MONEY RAINING FROM HEAVEN?” The answer to this question was a resounding affirmative reply. The gospel of Christ is the good news of God: God so loved the world that He wished to save humanity through Christ. This is the summary of the blessings of God, bestowed on the believers in Christ; this is delineated later on in the thesis (chapter 5). God’s blessings, metaphorically speaking, are indeed “raining from heaven”:

This was the assumption and point of departure of the thesis and the main research question has been whether the “Prosperity Gospel” is really a part of this approach, or whether it has deviated from it. In fact the Lausanne Theology Working Group states it openly that the Prosperity Gospel is deceitful:

*...it is our overall view that the teachings of those who most vigorously promote the ‘prosperity gospel’ are false and gravely distorting of the Bible, that their practice is...unChristlike, and that the impact on many churches is pastorally damaging, spiritually unhealthy, and not only offers no lasting hope, but may even deflect people from the message...of eternal salvation...it can be soberly described as a false gospel (2009; emphasis in original).*

This approach is to be researched in the thesis. Moreover, this research question of whether the Prosperity Gospel was a deviation of the gospel or not, was to be explored in the framework of mission – is it a valid gospel approach to perform mission work among impoverished people with the promises and “guarantees” of the Prosperity Gospel to win them over to Christ and the church? Again, The Lausanne



Group maintained the following opinion: “*Some prosperity teaching is not really about helping the poor at all, and provides no sustainable answer to the real causes of poverty*” (ibid; emphasis in original;). This is to be studied in a missiological framework.

The following questions in the research have been important: What is the framework of God’s mission and how does the church support God’s mission? What is the relationship between preaching and prosperity?

## 1.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This study sought to:

- Characterise the Prosperity Gospel (P G), and portray critical remarks of the P G scholars throughout the research
- Delineate briefly the origins and development of the P G
- Analyse ten sermons on the Prosperity Gospel, preached in charismatic and Pentecostal churches in black communities
- Draw conclusions of the sermons from the “Open coding analytical model”
- Synthesise creations of the determinations of the above analysis towards a theology of Prosperity Gospel
- Evaluate this theological synthesis according to the benchmark of the gospel of Christ
- Delineate proposals for further study regarding the P G.

The assumption of the aim of the research was that the P G has become a crucial part of the preaching and practice of the black pastors in the charismatic and Pentecostal churches, and they attract vast numbers of

people, especially poor people, with major consequences.

## 1.2 THE OBJECT OF THE RESEARCH

Has the prosperity gospel deviated from the gospel of Christ, and is it a valid method as part of the mission of the church to attract poor people? The Prosperity Gospel has influenced the preaching of the black churches and it was important to understand and conceptualise the effects theologically and practically. The consequences of the Prosperity Gospel according to the sermons were made plain with regard to the following questions:

- What are the differences between the Prosperity Gospel and the customary understanding of the gospel of Christ?
- How does the conventional understanding of the gospel deal with the issue of prosperity?
- Abuses of the Prosperity Gospel
- The theological effect on the preaching
- Deviations of the P G from the gospel of Christ

## 1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

A method describes a particular way of doing something. The research method followed in this study could be described as the *rationale* of researching the Prosperity Gospel objectively as far as possible, and to provide justifying reasons why this topic was important.

The topic also provided a stimulus and inspiration to research it as a possible new method in theological preaching. The *raison d'être* of the research was to conceptualise the meaning of the Prosperity Gospel in ten sermons. The research

method concentrated especially on the analysis and synthesis of the ten sermons on the Prosperity Gospel in the black charismatic and Pentecostal congregations. A limited literature study would be done in the light of the Grounded Theory approach and this would be done in chapter 3 where it would be fully elaborated and explained.

A research method could also be described as a research paradigm, a system of enquiry with a particular epistemological foundation regarding knowledge in terms of Spiritual enlightenment and insight into the gospel – in this case as God’s blessings in terms of “prosperity”. This method researched also the practical procedures of the preaching according to the Prosperity Gospel.

In addition, the method followed in this study is to research topics of authors, delineated in the study and to compare them with similar or oppositional statements in books, Internet articles and journal articles, etcetera, and to describe what happened in this historical epoch regarding the commencement and development of the Prosperity Gospel (cf. Hill, N 2007; Jones, D.W. & Woodbridge R.S., 2011; Moyo, J., 2012, ‘Preaching the gospel of bling’, *Mail & Guardian*, <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-04-04-preaching-the-gospel-of-bling>).

The method of the research was to debate arguments and to provide reasons for convictions, and to dispute opposite views. The study delineated different opinions, views and influences, and supplied reasons for a statement when one viewpoint was chosen from a variety of possibilities. This conviction was demarcated and described adequately with explanatory and vindicating reasons.

The method of writing was done in an original way, using quotations, but not excessively, either to corroborate arguments, or to reject other viewpoints, which

were used as “discussion partners” to enhance the topic and thesis in a valuable and opulent way.

The method of research was to influence sophisticated readers academically with an analytical approach, as well as a rational and systematic design and style of argument, used to provide reasons and quotations to substantiate the convictions of the thesis. The method was to provide information of the pros and cons of the Prosperity Gospel, especially according to the sermons, and to place this evaluation in a missiological framework.

#### **1.4 A CHARACTERISATION OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

The Prosperity Gospel was also called “Prosperity Theology” and sometimes the “Health and Wealth Gospel”; negative labels were also used, for example, “Name-it-and-claim-it”, and, more ridiculing, “Blab-it-and-grab-it”. Its history has been researched and was documented.

A characterisation of the Prosperity Gospel is as follows:

- It is a Christian religious doctrine, which claims that the Bible teaches that excessive financial blessings is the will of God for all Christians
- It teaches that faith and positive Christian speech, together with donations to Christian ministries, will always increase material wealth for the one contributing or “seeding”
- Proponents of the Prosperity Gospel claim this as the true doctrine and a path to Christian dominion over secular society
- Promises of prosperity from God especially to Abraham and Israel in the Old Testament are regarded to apply to all Christians in the New Testament

- Faith and “holy” acts, especially grants, called seed money, release this prosperity into the lives of Christians
- Christians have been given power over creation and the riches of the world as they are made in the image of God
- Speech used by Christians, known as positive confession, allow them to exercise dominion over all creation and its riches
- This dominion applies to one’s individual “soul” as well as to exterior objects
- This process of wellbeing is often taught in almost mechanical terms; some, for example Copeland, speaks of prosperity as being governed by a set of laws
- The process of gaining prosperity is often portrayed as a spiritual process according to certain formulae
- Prosperity has been described as an inviolable contract between God and his people regarding wealth
- It promotes a positive view of the spirit and body, teaching that Christians are entitled and warranted to happiness and material prosperity
- Physical and spiritual realities are both seen as a united reality that can be differentiated, but not separated
- All Christians are merited and entitled to physical health and economic prosperity
- The atonement of Christ, the reconciliation with God, is to be regarded as a removal of sickness, spiritual corruption and economic lack
- Poverty and sickness are believed to be curses to be broken by faith; this is to be achieved through positive confession, visualisation, and it is taught in mechanical terms according to “a contract” with God, which started with the covenant made with Abraham
- If Christians have faith in God, it is believed that He will deliver his promises of security and prosperity
- God will honour the confessing of these promises as an act of faith

- The prominent verses of the Bible used for this belief are as follows:  
 1 Chronicles 4:10 (The prayer of Jabez; "...enlarge my territory...and God granted his request"); Malachi 3:10 (About tithes for blessings); Matthew 25:14-30 (The parable about the talents); John 10:10 (The promise of abundant life); Philippians 4:19 (The supplying of every need); 3 John :2 (Prayer for prosperity in all things).

### **BIBLE CITATIONS OF SUPPORTERS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Supporters of the Prosperity Gospel frequently refer to the following Bible passages to support their preaching:

- Deuteronomy 28:11 "And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you."
- Malachi 3:10 "And prove me now herewith, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."
- Mark 11:24 "Therefore I say unto you, what things so-ever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them."
- John 14:14 "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

### **BIBLE CITATIONS OF CRITICS**

Critics of the Prosperity Gospel point to the following passages:

- 1Timothy 6:7-10 "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some

have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

- Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
- Luke 18:22-25 “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. ...How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
- Revelation 3:14-17 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:  
These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”

## **1.5 THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

The “health and prosperity gospel” is “one of the fastest growing religious movements on a global scale” (Hunt 2000:73):

- It has been “...adopted as far afield as Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Africa, India, Latin America and the Pacific rim of Southeast Asia” (Hunt 1998:272).
- This reflection was confirmed by a Time magazine poll, which determined that in the U S A, “17% of Christians” who were surveyed, “said they considered themselves” to be part of the “Prosperity Theology” movement (Van Biema & Chu 2006). Additionally, a “...full 61% believed that

God wants people to be prosperous”.

- On the African continent, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey in 2006 in which individuals were asked whether God would “grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith”, and whether “religious faith was very important to economic success” (Phiri & Maxwell 2007). Roughly 9 out of 10 participants from Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya answered affirmatively.

While the theology of the Prosperity Gospel is not monolithic, its “teachings follow a general pattern” (Folarin 2007:80). The movement’s dogma blends “Pentecostal revivalism with elements of positive thinking” (Coleman 1993:355; cf. Sarles 1986:330). Adherents insist that faith is a “supernatural” force that believers use to get whatever form of personal success they wish for, including physical health and material wealth.

Faith is also claimed to be the medium through which the full power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed. A theology of the spoken word, or “*rhema-tology*”, is the basis for these notions. There is an implicit confidence in the power of “positive confession”, in which faith enables what believers think and say to become actualised realities (Coleman 1993:356).

The theology of the Prosperity Gospel believes that through the “force” of faith the “positive” power of God is activated, and the negativity of Satan is confronted and negated.

It has become clear that the influence of the P G is growing virtually in all countries in the world and more and more Christians are influenced by it.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE HISTORY OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

#### **2.1 A HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND FOR COMPREHENDING THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

The main contribution of the thesis was the analysis and synthesis of the disclosures of the Prosperity Gospel preaching. It was necessary to establish a model, rule or a standard of assessment to be able to appraise “this gospel” with regard to the usual proclamation of the gospel of Christ. If this was not done the evaluation could have been only very personal and subjective and would not have been answerable to academic standards. We all live by opinions, convictions and beliefs, and everything we say and do are according to our convictions, except if we become dysfunctional, and consequently, incongruent.

Then again, our opinions and convictions are embedded in our system of values, of which we are not always very aware. Consequently, our Christian values determine our beliefs and convictions. The aim of this chapter is to disclose the background of the P G to understand it better to be able to evaluate it against a model or standard of our values and ultimately against the benchmark of the gospel.

The challenge is that if people and, in this case especially preachers, tell us about the P G and its effects and results, we are not certain what to believe – is it according to our beliefs, our values, and ultimately does it resonate with the benchmark, the gospel? To be able to reply to this challenge, we conducted an in-depth research regarding the historical and theological background of the P G.

In addition, we also had to set up our model of validity according to our beliefs and Christian values, and ultimately a characterisation of our benchmark, the gospel of Christ. With these results we could appraise the P G with a professional academic theological approach.

*The assumption of the thesis* is that God has promised the well-being of Christians, both spiritually, emotionally and materially – usually Christians rely on these promises to trust and pray for physical and material well-being, with the firm hope that God would supply in all their needs. Christians usually make dedicated donations to the work of the Lord and to His church, doing his work out of thankfulness for his blessings. God blesses a generous donor. The believers trust the Holy Spirit to guide them to provide abundantly where necessary for the causes of God, and on the other hand, also to trust God to supply abundantly in all their needs.

Over against this customary view of the gospel *the assumption of the thesis* is that it is not truthful to the gospel of Christ to maintain a second type of gospel next to the usual ministry of the church, claiming “special” faith and a multitude of additional donations to expect overwhelming physical, material and spiritual blessings from the Lord, according to the “laws of cause and effect”. This is viewed as a principle of “*do ut des*”, the Latin saying of the non-Christians to please God, so that He would bless them abundantly – “I do (give) that you may do (give)”.

It is vital to understand the background of the Prosperity Gospel to be able to weigh up the contemporary approaches:

- The background, including the origins of this movement
- The important contextual influences that affect the P G
- A few key people who have played a decisive role in the development of the movement

## **2.2 THE ORIGINS OF THE MOVEMENT**

Some believe that the origins of the P G are in the Charismatic and Pentecostal faith. McConnell (1995:xx), however, argued that this was not historically accurate. He claimed that specific convictions of the approach were from extra-biblical sources. Indeed, numerous sources have informed and influenced the P G. Here we concentrated on three primary influences on the historic development:

- The Pentecostal and the Charismatic influences
- The influence of Revivalism
- Specific “cultic” influences and teachings. Cultic here indicates a system of religious or spiritual beliefs, especially an informal and transient belief system regarded by the traditional churches as misguided, unorthodox, extremist, or even false, and directed by a charismatic, authoritarian leader.

## **2.3 THE CHARISMATIC AND PENTECOSTAL INFLUENCES**

There were even pre-Pentecostals, for example, John Wesley, Charles Finney and George Whitfield that were cited to influence the foundations of the P G (Vreeland 2001:9).

As the P G used a great deal of Pentecostal and evangelical jargon (slang terminology), it had the appearances of orthodoxy (Bjornstad 1986:69). Consequently, some assumed that the P G movement was the product of those traditions (Coleman 1993:355; Ezeigbo 1989:7; Sarles 1986:330; cf. Morris & Liroy 1995:3).

Some supporters of the P G were linked to the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, if not through specific church membership, at least by embracing various beliefs of those theological traditions. Consequently, the contemporary P G movement

benefited from various sectors of the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions (Smith 1987:27–30). Specific aspects were evident within the P G movement: While Pentecostalism emphasised the need for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the elements of healing, signs and wonders, as well as an emphasis on spiritual gifts were at the heart of the movement from its earliest days (Hollinger 1997:20).

Several distinctive beliefs of early Pentecostalism were obvious within the P G, although they were often manifested in more extremist forms (Moriarty 1992:27–29, cf. Morris & Liroy 1995):

- The belief that God is reviving the *contemporary* church
- The tendency to exalt spiritual manifestations
- A tendency to believe that prosperity is centered in “a personality”
- A tendency to produce followers and supporters, without a proper theological knowledge, perhaps because of a lack of education at the general level
- The belief that “an outpouring of the Holy Spirit” would bring about a unification of the churches.

## 2.4 THE INFLUENCE OF REVIVALISM

There was a contention that the P G had developed out of the revivals of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the U S A (cf. Hollinger 1997; Perriman, *et al* 2003).

Following World War II many evangelistic associations were established; many founded by leaders with Pentecostal backgrounds (Harrell 1975:4). Many leaders, who were dissatisfied with established denominational Pentecostalism, guided the Charismatic

movement with “healing revivalism” (Vreeland 2001:1). These healing revivals were often characterised by the following characteristics (Moriarty 1992:41–42, cf. Morris & Lioy 1995):

- Sensationalism and exaggerated announcements of “supernatural” interventions
- Exorbitant, inordinate or extravagant figures who took centre stage of the meetings
- Exaggerated views of deliverance
- Scandalous fund-raising techniques
- A distorted view of faith
- A preoccupation with Satan and demons
- New revelations as a way to obtain spiritual truth

The Prosperity Gospel movement contains elements of the healing revival movements, but in terms of praxis, these elements have been often in more extreme forms.

## **2.5 EXTRA-BIBLICAL AND HUMANISTIC INFLUENCES**

Some researchers, (cf. Hanegraaff 2009, Neuman 1990 and MacArthur 1992), argued that the Prosperity Gospel movement was infiltrated by extra-biblical and even humanistic influences through the early Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

The groupings of cultic movements emerging in 19<sup>th</sup> century America were classified in two groups (Perriman 2003:66–67):

- The historically or eschatologically oriented factions, for example, Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses

- The humanistic ahistorical or gnostic cults, which set off with a fascination of the powers of the mental and spiritual worlds, ranging from transcendentalism to the occult. The above influenced aspects of the P G movement profoundly.

Research suggested that due to its many evangelical tenets, the P G movement was not

strictly in principle and technically classifiable as a cult (cf. Bloodsworth 2009; Bowman 2001; Ezeigbo 1989; Farah 1981; Matta 1987; McConnell 1995; Neuman 1990). Specific aspects of the movement might have been understood as humanistic – this seemed undeniable. McConnell (1995:19) suggests that the P G movement is not a faction or “sect” in the sense of and to the degree of Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Christian Science.

## 2.6 CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES

Beyond the primary religious sources, various contextual influences also contributed to the development of the Prosperity Gospel. A few influences will be mentioned that enhanced the movement (Bloodsworth 2009:75):

### THE “AMERICAN DREAM”

The concept of the American dream, or the United States’ fascination with materialism, was supported with some notions of the Prosperity Gospel. Although this was more of a social influence than that of a spiritual stimulus it presented a contextual influence.

James Adams (1931) devised this phrase, “The American dream”, and submitted that life should be improved, “richer and full up” for everyone (cf. Adams 1931). He wrote this during the great depression and the concept inspired people for a better and brighter tomorrow.

After the depression and World War II the US society experienced a growing pragmatism, pursuing anything that promised to impact personal wealth and health (Simmons 1997:195).

This optimism changed the approach of the churches and theology:

- Denominational boundaries were no longer as significant as they were previously
- Trans-denominational special-purpose groups, including those propagating the Prosperity Gospel, were increasing (cf. Wuthnow 1988)
- The better, richer and fuller life indicated by the "American dream" was characterised primarily in terms of financial wealth (Cullen 2003:7). The enticement of material wealth attracted not only the lower income classes, but many in the upper strata as well
- During this time the Charismatic movement assisted to enlarge the social acceptance of the Pentecostal message, influencing many from the middle and upper classes (Crews 1990:159).

This remarkable and curious influences produced the context conducive for the Prosperity Gospel.

#### **PEALE'S "POSITIVE THINKING"**

The Prosperity Gospel movement was influenced to a great extent by the concept of positive thinking, promoted by Norman Vincent Peale (Cox 2001:272). The 1950's with the positive postwar climate sparked creative and optimistic possibilities with the focus on the individual (cf. D Meyer 1965).

Peale (1989–1993) served for fifty-two years as senior pastor of Marble Collegiate Church

in New York City. His book, *The power of positive thinking*, written in 1952 was perhaps his most well-known script, also known throughout the Western world.

This book is actually an informal compilation of his sermons, to assist the reader in achieving a happy, satisfying, and worthwhile life. In the introduction, Peale (1952:xi) wrote, “...this book is written to suggest...that you do not need to be defeated by anything, that you can have peace of mind, improved health, and a never-ceasing flow of energy. In short, that your life can be full of joy and satisfaction”.

It is most significant that Peale’s father, Charles Clifford Peale, a former physician turned Methodist minister, summarised the younger Peale’s theology as “...a composite of New Thought, metaphysics, Christian Science, medical and psychological practice, Baptist evangelism, Methodist witnessing, and solid Dutch Reformed Calvinism” (Braden 1966:391; emphasis added). Peale’s integration of “New Thought” principles with biblical theology provided the fertile soil later utilised in developing the message of the Prosperity Gospel.

## ROGERIAN PSYCHOLOGY

The ground-breaking concept of psychology, a non-directive, person-centered, psychotherapeutic approach to counselling by Rogers (1902-1987) came to the fore (cf. Rogers 1951). The goal of this novel method was to facilitate “self-actualisation”. The Rogerian model emphasised the clients’ ability to determine what was best for them, while the role of the counsellor was to assist the client by encouraging, endorsing and reinforcing *positive thinking* (Starner 2006:394).



Here, as in Peale's affirmations, however, there was an anthropocentric focus, where the human being was regarded as the central issue in the universe. This direct and indirect contextual influence was important for the Prosperity Gospel, and with the idea of positive thinking of Peale, played an important part in the influencing of the P G.

## **EXPERIENCE-CENTRED THEOLOGY**

Schleiermacher, a brilliant theologian, had a great influence in society from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements to stimulate an experience-centered Christianity (Bloodsworth 2009:75). Because of their spontaneous spirituality, over against the more Reformed dogmatic approach, these two movements expanded rapidly at the popular level. The emphasis on experience spread through testimony and personal contact, affecting people emotionally (Anderson 2004:62). Consequently, the underlying core of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movements could not be comprehended and apprehended through dogma and doctrine alone, but through a narrative theology, whose central expression is "testimony" (Cox 2001:58, 68–71). Theology and experience deeply influenced each other within the Pentecostal movement (Jacobsen 2003:5). This also indicated an anti-education mentality, with an emphasis on experience-centered Christianity for every Christian.

## **2.7 KEY PERSONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

The P G movement has been extraordinarily diverse and complex with numerous nuances; consequently, we could mention many influential figures contributing to its development.

For our purposes we emphasise four noteworthy leaders in this regard:

## **PHINIAS QUIMBY**

The origins of the P G movement could be discovered from Phineas Quimby (1802–1866), whose teachings formed the basis for numerous 19<sup>th</sup> century mind-cure healing movements, and who is considered the forefather of the “New Thought” (Jacobsen 2003:396; Harley 1991:77–79, *et al*). Although Quimby was not really a founder of “mental science”, but was only one of many “mental healers” during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Tucker 1989:153), his teachings fully embodied the concept, mental science. After experiencing a personal illness, Quimby became disillusioned with the conventional medical practice of his time. In 1838, he witnessed a public demonstration of “mesmerizing” healing. Quimby researched mesmeric healing for approximately two years before beginning the practice himself in 1840 (Smith 1995:58). Quimby popularised the idea that disease and suffering originate from incorrect thinking, positing that illness is curable through healthy attitudes and positive thinking. His basic ideas were the following, “If I believe I am sick, I am sick”, for my feelings are my sickness, and my sickness is my belief, and my belief is my mind. All disease, therefore, is in the mind or belief. Now, as our belief or disease is made up of ideas, which are spiritual matter, it is necessary to know what beliefs we are in; for to cure the disease is to correct the error, and as disease is what follows the error, it destroys the cause, and the effect will cease...Your error is the cause of your sickness or trouble. Now to cure your sickness or trouble is to correct the error”. (cf. Quimby 1921:186).

Quimby held that one could create one’s own reality via the power of positive affirmation or confession (Braden 1966:121–123). As such, one could visualise health and wealth, affirm or confess them with one’s words, with the result of intangible images becoming a reality (Bristol 1948:122).

This concept was championed by other key persons and was central to specific tenets of P G theology.

#### **WILLIAM KENYON**

The person who represented the basic genesis of the P G movement was William Kenyon (1867–1948); (cf. Hanegraaff 2009; MacArthur 1992; McConnell 1995).

Kenyon's early religious affiliation was with the Methodist Episcopal Church. He later established and worked as pastor in several Baptist churches until his death. Kenyon enrolled in the Emerson College of Oratory in 1892, an institution known for its dissemination of metaphysical, transcendental, and "New Thought" teachings.

Although some researchers, (cf. DeArteaga 1992, Simmons 1997 and Vreeland 2001), diminished this influence, others (cf. Cannon, Hanegraaff 2009, Matta 1987 and McConnell 1995), posited

that his association with the Emerson College greatly influenced the development of his theology. Believing the dry and stale Protestant churches of his day were unable to offer what aspects of "mind science"- teaching could offer, Kenyon sought to establish a new kind of Christianity—a blend of Christianity and "New Thought" science (Geracie 1993:55).

Indeed, Kenyon's writings (1942:76–84) revealed influences beyond the scope of his Protestant theological affiliation and interpretation, for example, he suggested that when David's soldiers appropriated the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, they became supermen and were shielded from death during warfare. Kenyon alluded to the formation of "supermen, a master race" of Christians *no longer bound by external realities*. He advanced the notion of living in "perfect health", free from the "limitations" of the physical nature, and proposed that the "creative ability" of God observed in creation was imparted to believers in the present reality (Kenyon 1943:90; 1945:93; cf. Rom 4:17).

Although Kenyon believed he had rediscovered hidden or lost “truths” from scripture, his efforts to revitalise the churches of his day involved the incorporation of metaphysical religious concepts, i.e. an amalgamation of evangelical Christianity and transcendental mind-science (Smith 1995:153–154, 168). Many of the phrases popularised by contemporary P G proponents, such as, “What I confess, I possess”, were coined by Kenyon (Hanegraaff 2009:18).

#### **WILLIAM BRANHAM**

The P G movement could be traced to the more extreme healing revivalists of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, William Branham, 1909–1965 (Anderson 2004:157; Jacobsen 2003:396). Branham was called the second father of the modern P G movement

(Bowman 2001:86). Since he was influenced by, and often quoted the works of, Kenyon (Simmons 1985:386), aspects of Branham’s ministry and teaching facilitated the development of the P G movement.

Branham was the major influence on the Latter Rain Movement, characterised by the following seven beliefs:

- Belief in a complete restoration of 1<sup>st</sup> century truths, just after Christ
- The restoration of the five-fold ministry of apostles and prophets to accompany pastors, evangelists and teachers
- The spiritual disciplines of deliverance, fasting and the laying on of hands for “impartation”
- Restoration of personal prophecy to the church
- Recovery of true worship in the church
- The belief that those operating in the truth of Latter Rain restoration would be blessed with immortality before Christ’s return

- The belief that the various segments of the church would receive unity of the faith before Jesus returns (Bowman 2001:44–47).

Branham also believed several highly controversial notions:

- The belief that God’s message to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 were directed toward various epochs in history. He stated that Paul was the messenger to the Ephesian church, Irenaeus was the messenger to the Smyranean church, Martin was the messenger to the Pergamean church, Columba was the messenger to the Thyatiran church, Luther was the messenger to the Sardisean church, Wesley was the messenger to the Philadelphian church, and that he (Branham) was the messenger to the Laodicean church
- The bizarre “serpent seed doctrine” of Genesis 3, in which Eve is purported to have been sexually intimate with the serpent, with produced Cain as a result of the union, placed inordinate emphasis on “supernatural” manifestations, in which Branham, for another example, was dependent on the presence of an angel to minister effectively to the attendees.

Branham is a representative of numerous healing ministries of his day, many of which devolved into an emphasis on the miraculous that led to shameful “showmanship”, moral decadence, exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims of healing, and a “triumphalism” that betrayed the humility of the cross (Anderson 2004:59). Many contemporary “word of faith” televangelists were heavily indebted to the Latter Rain movement and especially to Branham (Bowman 2001:89).

**KENNETH HAGIN**

While Hagin (1917–2003) was often referred to as the father of the P G movement, he was initially responsible for disseminating Kenyon’s material at the popular level (Hanegraaff 2009:17). Converted in 1933, Hagin purportedly received healing the following year of a congenital heart disease (Riss 2003:687). He began his ministry as a lay preacher in a multi-denominational church. In 1937, Hagin was “baptised in the Holy Spirit” and began ministering in various Pentecostal churches. His itinerant ministry began in 1949, culminating in the establishment of a ministry base in 1963 (Tang 2006:2).

In 1974 Hagin founded the Rhema Bible Training Centre in Johannesburg, which by 2000 had 16,500 graduates. Hagin’s influence among Pentecostals and Charismatics at large is important because of the implications of his theology, much of which is directly copied from the writings of Kenyon. Researchers, for example, Hanegraaff 2009 and McConnell 1995, cite extensive and frequent quotations from at least eight of Kenyon’s books. Hagin attributed his theological system, “faith-formula” theology to visions, revelations, and personal visitations of Jesus (cf. Moriarty 1992:83).

Hagin’s writings facilitated an understanding not only of the origin of many of his teachings, but also, the development of specific aspects of P G theology. Through his writings, mass media, and the Rhema Bible Training Centre, Hagin influenced numerous pastors and believers within the broader Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions.

## **2.8 A BACKGROUND OF KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL MESSAGE**

There were several reasons why the Prosperity Gospel message gained popularity and expanded in influence. A brief treatment of “mind-cure” was a requirement of the task of analysing the specific notions of the P G message. The “mental healers” of the post-war U S used the concept “metaphysics” as the causative view of the mind and its control over “matter”; “mind over the body” and the “mind over wealth”. The relationship between mind and matter was understood to enable people to obtain bodily healing (Smith 1995:34). It is difficult to find an adequate term for this movement as it already existed in the 1850’s to the 1900’s; however, the description most often used is “mind-cure” (Gottschalk 1973:99). Within the mind-cure movement resided various streams of thought: From absolute monism to objective idealism (cf. Anderson 1991). The basic sources that contributed to the mind-cure worldview and prosperity were the following:

- Philosophical idealism
- Swedenborgianism
- Mesmerism
- Unitarianism
- Transcendentalism (Smith 1995:vi).

Here, a brief evaluation of each influence of the P G movement is in order:

- *Philosophical idealism* provided the core element of the “mind-cure” worldview: The relationship between mind and matter is critical. Idealism is the conviction that matter does not exist in its own right, but is brought forth by the mind. Already Plato (427–347 BC) believed that there existed a world of ideas and forms, not merely ideas in the mind, but ideas which existed objectively and absolutely in addition to the world of sensible objects (Smith 1995:36). Plato focused his attention not on the variable objects of sense experience, but on the fixed and abiding substance and essence of things as the only possible objects of true knowledge. This was already an attempt to

harmonise the physical and the ideal (Miller 1992:75). Although there were varieties of objective and subjective idealism, the fundamental belief was that the *mind expresses and defines matter*. This meant that the *mind is primary and matter secondary*.

Based on the above premise, “mind-cure”, as well as a variety of beliefs was followed and the leaders were convinced that the mind controlled matter or the objective world; “mind healers” then claimed that matter or the objective world is “causative”, and consequently, the mind can control matter (Smith 1995:37–38). Hence, philosophical idealism provides a valid basis for specific aspects of a *positive confession and physical healings*, also according to the aims of the Prosperity Gospel.

- *Swedenborgianism* was known as The Church of New Jerusalem. This movement started during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century from the writings and mystical experiences of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Swedenborgianism is a heterogeneous theology, “correcting” a great deal of orthodoxy. Like Joseph Smith, who founded Mormonism, Swedenborg was convinced he was a messenger from God to his generation. He wrote more than thirty religious volumes, based on communication with “spirit guides”, who offered new biblical interpretations and extra-biblical revelations (Tucker 1989:381). Swedenborg wrote, “I have written entire pages, and the spirits did not dictate the words, but absolutely guided my hand, so that it was they who were doing the writing ... as flowed from God ‘Messiah’” (Sigstedt 1952:211).

Smith (1995:39) argued that Swedenborg’s spiritual approach to hermeneutics became a common feature among the exponents of “mind-cure”: The



“correction” of the traditional, literal, sense-derived interpretation of scripture by a deeper, spiritually perceived understanding of revelation. Notions of this approach were also found in aspects of the P G message, and can be listed, therefore, among its numerous foundations.

- *Mesmerism* is derived from Franz Mesmer (1734-1815). He used magnetic cure supposedly to realign the body’s electricity. Mesmer’s theories and practices were rejected by the traditional medical community of his day; aspects of his theory, however, were further explored. In 1784 Count Maxime de Puysegur replaced the use of magnets with verbal commands and touch. Through mesmeric experimentation, Puysegur discovered two of the central elements of hypnosis: Artificially induced somnambulism, and posthypnotic amnesia, which, according to Zweig (1932:72), was the origin of the modern science of psychology.

The foundational notion of this discovery was *the theory of suggestion*, the subjective mental suggestion, in modern psychology. Although Mesmer was not considered the father of “mind-cure”, his discoveries provided the foundation for what becomes the “scientific component” of mental healing, a premise that is

obviously transitional to Christian Science and “mind-cure” (Smith 1995:44).

Mesmeric healing introduced Phineas Quimby to the concept of mental influence and healing, which in turn influenced E W Kenyon, and ultimately became a source for specific aspects of the Prosperity Gospel.

- *Unitarianism* started with the election and installation of Henry Ware to Harvard’s Divinity chair in 1805. Orthodox reaction to this event was the

founding of Andover Seminary (1807) to train candidates for orthodox divinity, a task for which Harvard was no longer deemed acceptable (Wright 1975:8).

Unitarianism conveyed an overt anti-orthodox sentiment, embracing much of Enlightenment thinking, namely, a deistic worldview, utilitarian ethics, and an epistemology combining empiricism, rationalism, and scepticism (Smith 1995:46). Such emphases later influenced and affected the “mind-cure” movement (Atkins 1923:220–222).

- *“Mind-cure”* understood the miraculous in terms of *discovering and utilising various laws of the universe* while disregarding much of theology, based on revelation. Although “mind-cure” was not in the main Unitarian, indeed, aspects of Unitarian theology could be found to have influenced its development in that it nurtured an anti-orthodox sentiment, and held a deep reverence for “natural law”; it emphasised the employment of reason in the inner life, and a number of leading figures in “mind-cure” were Unitarians or from that background (Atkins 1923:226). Consequently, Mind-cure and Unitarianism are among the sources of the Prosperity Gospel.
- *Transcendentalism*. This belief system brings together several core elements of “mind-cure”; specifically, the mystic character of eastern philosophy, a deified view of human potential, and the Swedenborgian understanding of “cause and effect”. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), a former Unitarian minister, pioneered the concepts of Transcendentalism in America, along with literary specialists, for example, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, William Channing, and Theodore Parker.

Transcendentalism basically maintained that the human spirit has unlimited potential. The physical senses were inadequate to reveal reality, which was knowable only by the inner perception of the human spirit. Gaining “revelation knowledge” was through direct influx of divine wisdom to the individual, transcending the natural science of the physical world (Judah 1967:26). Kenyon, ultimately finding its way into aspects of the P G movement, introduced the concept of “revelation knowledge”.

From these influences on Prosperity Gospel emerged five characteristics that informed “*mind-cure*” and *prosperity as a worldview*:

- An idealism that stressed mind over matter, the objective world and also over riches
- A subjective epistemology aimed at the ascendancy of inner spiritual perception over external physical sensation, with an application both to bodily conditions and word meanings
- The discovery and application of universal laws governing mind and matter with application to bodily healing, spiritual enlightenment and faith rewards regarding prosperity
- A mystic tendency concerning the nature of mind and matter, and their underlying harmony tending, in a sense, *to deify humanity*
- An on-going connection to the world of paranormal or occult knowledge and spiritism in particular (Smith 1995:55). The religious climate of this period informed the development of the P G by the atmosphere in which specific tenets of the movement were cultivated.

This “worldview” influenced most of the P G preachers to a major or minor degree, including the many serious deviations from the gospel of Christ. This would become

clear in the analysis of the sermons of the ten prosperity sermons, which were researched.

## 2.9 A BRIEF EVALUATION OF AN EXAMPLE OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN AFICA: D O OYEDEPO

The following is a typical approach to the Prosperity Gospel, by one of its leaders in Nigeria:

- The point of departure of his book, *Understanding financial prosperity*, and its approach is that prosperity in terms of material wealth is God's blessing to his children, and to "make you a blessing" of God's prosperity of riches (Oyedepo 2005:6); this is a "God-given kingdom of prosperity" and the method or way to this "secret house of wealth" is "to lay hold of His commandments". Oyedepo follows this approach as he regards himself a commander in wealth: "I make bold to say that *I am a commander in the realm of wealth...I don't pray for money...I only line up myself with his commandments, and it just keeps flowing...and all you need is to turn loose for Jesus!*" (Ibid: 6, 7; emphasis added).

The above point of departure is predetermined and it is his hermeneutical key to the Bible – the approach in his book is that he has delineated his convictions and assumptions and then he has used all kinds of Bible texts to confirm his viewpoint and beliefs: This is an ideological approach to the Bible and prosperity – he has maintained this set of human convictions as an ideology in his suppositions and his interpretation of his experiences regarding prosperity as an absolute norm. This ideology is then used as a hermeneutical key to the Bible including numerous texts, all of which is interpreted through the concept of material wealth, to confirm his predetermined conviction.

**Of course he would not acknowledge it that it is a predetermined view as he would claim that it is gleaned from the Bible, but he does not show where in the Bible these convictions are stated as such, as he used the Bible only to validate his claims and not the other way round.**

**A more valid way is to use an inductive method of interpreting the Bible where the context of the texts is delineated and the background is disclosed and then, subsequently, the particular viewpoint is developed. To maintain an ideological humanistic conviction works the other way round as the conviction is assumed in a deductive approach where the details, in this case, the texts are randomly fitted into his frame of conviction.**

**The ideological approach and point of departure is not a new method and tactic as this is not a Christian approach at all, but a methodology used in politics, advertising in business and in determining all kinds of policy in society. An absolute statement of “truth” is normally made, spelling out the consequences of the viewpoint and only afterwards the reasons or proofs are supplied to support the final conviction, which was taken in advance.**

**A valid approach and attitude is to investigate the merits of a case, analyse the results and provide justifying reasons to make a specific choice regarding a conviction. This is also the valid approach regarding the scriptures: Texts have to be examined exegetically, interpreted and analysed in their contexts, compared to other similar pronouncements and in the contexts in which they appear and at the specific stages of God’s historical revelation when they were disclosed. After all these measures have been meticulously followed, you can supply justifying reasons why texts, for example, have a specific meaning.**

A person's experience is also not the standard or benchmark for validity regarding prosperity as there are numerous factors in a person's life to be taken account of, which are normally not disclosed. A prosperity preacher, for example, Pastor Oyedepo may only disclose his "faith" in "God's commandments" and not all the other aspects of his life where he may find him/her in a very favourable position to be able to convince people in numerous ways to provide wealth. Again, you have to investigate all the relevant details of such a person's life to obtain a complete picture of the situation, analyse the details and provide justifying reasons to come to a specific conclusion.

It is important when you use a specific series of texts to build up a conviction; also to use similar verses on the same topic which convey the opposite message as in the case of the prosperity gospel where only "proof texts" of the Old Testament are used. There are two series of texts in the Bible on "prosperity" and you can only come to a valid interpretation of the "Prosperity Gospel" after you have followed the above approach, otherwise you tend to fall back on an ideology, making a viewpoint or your experience as the ultimate norm and then you simply "force" the meaning of texts into the framework of your conviction and proclaim that as God's will.

In the light of Oyedepo's approach and especially where he "condemns" Christians not following his way, (compare his statement quoted in the following section), that those Christians are "misfits" in the Kingdom of God. We have to reject this approach of using the Bible:

Once interpreters' experience at first had the destructive consequences of *interpreting the biblical text to support ideologies of any kind* and especially to justify discrimination against fellow human beings, a deeper understanding not only of the dangers, but also of the grave responsibility of hermeneutics often

emerges. *Interpreters in such a situation are bound to lose their naïve view that all interpretations of the Bible are equally valid and that the process of interpretation is innocent. Interpretation does not matter.* But interpreters also experience the power of the text to overcome the ideological bias and rediscover the biblical thrust of the equality of all people before God (Du Toit 2009:103; emphasis added).

Consider, for example, the book of D O Oyedepo: All his texts which he has used to “prove” his ultimate conviction are taken from the Old Testament. He also quoted a number of texts from the New Testament, but they were simply not relevant to “prove” his conviction. He did not even use any valid methodology or style as a convincing argument to interpret the Old Testament texts, regardless of the texts in the New Testament where the Old Testament was fulfilled in Christ, as the final norm of the “Word of God”, John 1:1-3, through whom God now speaks (Hebr. 1:1). Christ disclosed to the friends of Emmaus how the Old Testament was fulfilled in His life, death and resurrection, after God resurrected him from the grave. The Old Testament is simply not valid in the sense in which Oyedepo has interpreted and used it. For Christians the Old Testament can only be interpreted and understood in terms of the New Testament and especially in the gospel of the cross and resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, enlightening and applying this gospel of God in Christ.

In addition, we have to mention the difficult analysis of the gospels and what was disclosed before the cross and resurrection of Christ – which was again interpreted, especially by Paul, to bring the gospel of Christ to a final revelation. The “fully revealed gospel” of Christ is the benchmark according to which the previous “revelation history” has to be interpreted, as God spoke in many ways and different times, but now finally in and through His Son – and *al the promises of God is only*

***“yeah and amen” in Christ.*** This was delineated where the benchmark of the gospel as a “prosperity gospel of abundant life” was delineated in the thesis, to be used as a norm against deviations.

The next step is to use all these arguments and apply them specifically to the book and viewpoints of Oyedepo:

- He was using a few simple concepts and methods to maintain his conviction of the P G. He has spoken of “a source” to which “I want to introduce you” in this book, “...The moment you appreciate and apply yourself *to that way, life will deliver* to you its maximum benefits” (Oyedepo, *ibid*: 5; emphasis added). Here he made “life” as such the source and not God. Moreover, he has not supplied any basis from scripture for this “source” or for “life” supplying wealth.
- He claimed to be “...a commander in the realm of wealth” (*ibid*: 6). He did not provide any reference to the Bible whatsoever for this excessive bold mandate, right and claim, but only ascribed it to his personal experience of this conviction. This was clearly not based on the gospel of Christ – nowhere did any apostle, including Paul, make such preposterous self-centred claims.
- His prosperity gospel is in fact anthropocentric, as he has claimed, “I am not only to teach it, *but to effect it*”, as if it is *not* God or His Spirit who effects it (*ibid*: 14; emphasis added).
- His conviction of identity has been completely unchristian as he has said, “*Prosperity is our identity. If you don’t demonstrate it then you are a misfit in the kingdom*” (*ibid*: 17; emphasis added). Paul testifies that sometimes he had been “poor” and in “suffering”, but that the grace of God was sufficient for him. Paul’s identity has been, “Christ lives in me”.
- His P G conviction was simply based on his interpretation of an OT concept of the covenant of God and he has totally ignored the covenant of Jesus, which



He called the new covenant in His blood when He installed communion with his disciples. Consequently, the approach of Oyedepo is disastrously a “performance” of the believers: “Prosperity in the kingdom doesn’t answer to...prayer, or prayer of agreement! It only answers to your understanding and practice of covenant details!...and then the power to realise the promise will be delivered to you”. Again, “...the power to get wealth is released on the platform of the covenant of prosperity (ibid:23, 24 & 25).

As we have indicated previously it is invalid to take the Bible as such and interpret every word as applicable as it stands in the Bible as the will of God for us. God has provided a historical revelation in different stages to us, as we outlined the history of Israel, for example in the stages of “security”, “justice” and “love and care”, culminating in the unconditional love, portrayed by and in the life of Christ. There is prosperity for Christians as the research has indicated, but then only by the grace of God in Christ, always only in accordance with his will, reflected in the benchmark of the gospel of Christ: I have come that you may have life in abundance (John 10:10).

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

#### AN “OPEN CODING” ANALYTICAL MODEL OF SERMONS REGARDING THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL BY TEN PASTORS IN BLACK CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

##### 3.1 THE BACKGROUND: THE GROUNDED THEORY AS METHODOLOGY

The Grounded Theory method is a systematic methodology, involving the discovery of theory through the analysis of data; in this research through the data of P G preaching by ten pastors. This method is mainly used in qualitative research. It will become practically clear in the actual analysis of the sermons, but it is necessary to formulate the principles of the Grounded Theory as method:

The Grounded Theory method is a research method which operates almost in a reverse fashion from traditional social science research. Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, the first step is data collection. From the data collected the key points are marked with a series of *codes*, which are extracted from the scripts. The codes are grouped into similar *concepts* in order to make them more workable and effective. From these concepts, *categories* are formed, which are the basis for the creation of a *theory*, or a reverse engineered hypothesis.

This contradicts the traditional model of research, where the researcher chooses a theoretical framework, and only then applies this model to the phenomenon to be studied. This is also known as the Constant Comparative Method, a way of comparing data with theory (cf. Glaser & Strauss, *The discovery of grounded Theory* 1967; B Glaser, 1993, especially Ch. VIII; and the various publications of Charmaz, K, 2 000, 20003, 2006, 2008 & 2009 have been consulted).

### 3.2 THE STAGES OF ANALYSIS

<u>STAGES</u>	<u>GOALS</u>
<i>Codes</i>	Identifying mooring descriptions that allowed the <i>key points</i> of the data to be gathered
<i>Concepts</i>	Collections of <i>codes</i> of similar contents that allowed the data to be compiled in groups
<i>Categories</i>	Broad groups of similar <i>concepts</i> that are used to generate a <i>theory</i>
<i>Theory</i>	A collection of <i>descriptions</i> that explained the subject of the research.

### 3.3 POSTULATES OF THE GROUNDED THEORY

The Grounded Theory method is a systematic generation of theory from data that contains both *inductive and deductive thinking*. One goal is to formulate hypotheses based on conceptual ideas. The aim is to verify the hypotheses that are generated by constantly comparing conceptualised data on different levels of abstraction, and these comparisons contain deductive steps.

Another goal of the Grounded Theory is to discover *the participants' main concerns*. The questions the researcher repeatedly asked were, "What was this about?" "What was the main problem of the preacher, and how was he/she proposing to solve it?" These questions would be answered by the collected data.

The Grounded Theory Method endeavours to conceptualise what was going on by using sermon research. In a way, the Grounded Theory method resembles what many

researchers do when retrospectively formulating new hypotheses to fit data. Applying the Grounded Theory method, the researcher does not formulate hypotheses in advance since preconceived hypotheses result in theories that are “ungrounded” according to the data.

If the researcher's goal is an *accurate*, flawless description, then another method should be chosen since grounded theory is *not a descriptive method*. Instead it has *the goal of producing general concepts that explain the way that people resolve their central concerns*. The emphasis is not on the correctness of concepts by way of accurate description, but the use of description according to a theory generated by the Grounded Theory Method mainly *to illustrate concepts*.

In most behavioural research the action of persons and endeavours in general are the units of analysis, whereas in Grounded Theory *the unit of analysis is the incident of preaching in the research*.

When comparing a number of sermons on the P G, the emerging concepts and their relationships are in reality “probability statements”. Consequently, Grounded Theory is a general method, but using mostly qualitative data (Glaser, 2001, 2003); however, although working with probabilities, most Grounded Theory studies are considered as qualitative since statistical methods are not used, and figures are not presented as primary. *The results of Grounded Theory are not a reporting of statistically significant probabilities, but a set of probability statements* about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from the research data (Glaser 1998). Consequently, validity or veracity in its traditional sense is not an issue in Grounded Theory, which instead should be judged by “*fit*”, “*relevance*”, “*workability*”, and “*modifiability*” (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, Glaser 1998):

FIT

“Fit” has to do with how closely concepts fit with the *meaning of the message*, and this is related to how thoroughly the constant comparison of the key messages of the sermons to concepts was done.

## RELEVANCE

A “relevant” study deals with the real concern of the preachers, evoking the taking hold of the listeners’ attention and is not only of academic interest.

## WORKABILITY

The Grounded Theory “works” when it explains how the addressed problem is being solved with a variety of approaches.

## MODIFIABILITY

A “modifiable” theory can be altered when new relevant data are compared to existing data of sermons. A Grounded Theory is never “right or wrong”, as it just has more or less “fit, relevance, workability and modifiability”.

## 3.4 GROUNDED THEORY TERMINOLOGY

A *concept* is the overall element in the sermon and form the categories which are conceptual elements standing by themselves; properties of categories are stable conceptual aspects of categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The core variable as a concept explains most of the sermons’ main concerns with as much different approaches as possible. A core variable can be theoretically modelled as a basic approach in sermons that accounts for most of the variation in changes, contexts and behaviours. "Grounded Theory is multivariate. It happens sequentially, subsequently, simultaneously, serendipitously, and scheduled" (Glaser, 1998).

*All research data* was to be fed into the Grounded Theory, which meant that everything that was appropriated by the researcher in sermons was data-generating concepts for the emerging theory. It is even possible, and sometimes a good idea, for a researcher with knowledge in the studied area to *“interview himself”*, treating this like the other sermons’ data, coding and comparing it, and generating concepts from it. This may be unfamiliar, but one has to remember that one knew it on the conceptual level, and Grounded Theory deals with *conceptual level data*.

*Open coding or substantive coding* is conceptualising on the first level of abstraction. Written data from sermon scripts, notes or transcripts were conceptualised by way of topics. All incidents relating to the P G were to be in the data, which yielded many concepts. These were compared as the research codes and merged into new concepts, and eventually renamed and modified. The Grounded Theory researcher went back and forth while comparing data, constantly modifying, and sharpening the growing theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) also proposed *axial coding* and defined it in 1990 as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories." They proposed a "coding paradigm" that involved "conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences." (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:96)

Selective coding is done after having found the core variable, or what is thought to be the core, or even the “tentative core”. The “core” explains the sermons in resolving the main concern. The *tentative* core would never be wrong. It just more or less fitted in with the data of the sermons. After the research had chosen a core variable, the researcher selectively “coded” data with the core guiding the coding, not bothering about concepts with little importance to the core. Also, the researcher now selectively sampled new data with the core in mind, which is called *theoretical sampling* – a

deductive part of Grounded Theory. *Selective coding* demarcated the study, which made it move fast. This was indeed encouraged while conducting Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1998), since Grounded Theory was not concerned with data accuracy as in descriptive research, but it was about generating concepts that were abstract of time, place and people.

*Theoretical codes* integrated the theory by weaving the concepts into hypotheses that work together in a theory, explaining the main concern of the preachers. Theoretical coding meant that the researcher applied a theoretical model to the data. It was important that this model was not forced beforehand, but had emerged during the comparative process of the Grounded Theory. So, the *theoretical codes*, just as *substantive or applicable codes*, should have emerged from the process of constantly comparing the data in sermons.

*Naming concepts* was developing ideas and relating them to each other. This was the accumulation of ideas into a bank of ideas and data. This bank would later become written theory. This was a total creative freedom without rules of writing, grammar or style as it was an outflow of ideas (Glaser 1998).

*Sorting* put the fractured concepts back together towards formulating a theory for presentation. *Sorting* generated theory that explained the main messages in the sermons – it was all about the connection between concepts.

### 3.5 A CRITIQUE OF THE GROUNDED THEORY

Criticism of the Grounded Theory had focused on its misunderstood *status as theory*:

- The question was whether this was really a *theory* – was this actually a body of ideas, principles and techniques that applied to a subject, especially when seen as *distinct* from actual practice? Was it indeed a set of propositions, or

principles analysed in their relation to one another and used to explain phenomena?

- The notion of “*ground*”: Why was “grounding”, founding or substantiation important in this qualitative research inquiry - what was this research “grounded” in? Data or facts could not have the “ground” as they were researched, and the research had to be grounded on “something else – the question was, “On what?”
- The claim was to use and develop inductive knowledge – why? Does logic generalisation really produce a universal claim or “principle” from observed instances? Would that not be an arbitrary principle, not really grounded?
- *Is it possible to free oneself of preconceptions in the collection and analysis of data* (This criticism is summed up by Thomas and James, 2006:767-795). The query was whether researchers not always had already preconceptions, and would it be possible to gather data, choosing some and leaving out others, without any weighing up and assessing data.
- The formulaic, prescribed and mechanical nature of the Grounded Theory method and the lack of congruence of this with open and creative interpretation, the hallmark of qualitative inquiry, was a concern.
- One element of the Grounded Theory worth keeping in high esteem was the constant comparative method – a highly rated method
- Other qualitative research methodologies, apart from the Grounded Theory method, were also just as important, for example, narratology, ethnography and storytelling.

One alternative to grounded theory was *Engaged Theory*: It puts an equal emphasis on doing on-the-ground work linked to analytical processes of experimental generalisation. Unlike Grounded Theory, *Engaged Theory* is in the Critical Theory tradition, locating those processes within a larger theoretical framework that specified different levels of abstraction at which one could make claims about society and the



world. The significance for this research is the wider world of the contemporary consumer society, where money and belongings have become the ultimate concern and components of human beings according to the capitalistic globalisation of the whole world – this, however, is not a part of the present research.

For the purpose of the present research, to have comprehended the Prosperity Gospel in the black charismatic churches, *the Grounded Theory suited this purpose adequately*, but took other possibilities and the evaluation of the Grounded Theory into account.

### **3.6 THE PRACTICAL RESEARCH THESIS ACCORDING TO THE GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY**

The thesis constructed a “grounded theory” analysis of sermons of ten pastors in black Charismatic churches in South Africa on the Prosperity Gospel according to the following categories:

- The problem addressed in the research was what was the approach in, and contents of, the sermons regarding the Prosperity Gospel. Some of the main questions, for example, in the research to be answered were how the preachers dealt with the P G: Was the basis of this preaching from the Bible? What were the preachers’ basic claims regarding the P G? Were there legitimate or justifying reasons disclosed for these claims?
- The main text used as background to analyse the sermons was John 10:10, *“I came that they may have life , and have it in abundance”*
- The main concepts of the preached Prosperity Gospel was the following:
  - “Faith”, as trust in God’s covenant according to Abraham, inherited by the Christians: Christians were to be blessed in abundance by God’s covenant of wealth

- “A claim” on God’s promises; the right all Christians had in their entitlement to material wealth – no Christian had to be poor as that was not the will of God
  - “Abundance”, the prerogative Christians had regarding material wealth – not only life support, but extravagance in wealth.
- The aim was to develop an “open coding” model from the sermons. Substantial portions of the sermons on the P G were analysed, coded and “grouped”: The result of that method was the above research conclusions, *“faith, claim and abundance”* as the categories, based on the data of the sermons. Categories from the researched data were conceptualised. From these categories an analytical model with hypotheses on the P G was constructed according to the “open coding” model.
  - This Grounded Theory approach has been applied in practical theological homiletics in the empirical field by F G Immink and his research group in Utrecht, The Netherlands (cf. Pleizier 2010 & Pieterse 2011). Originally the grounded theory method was developed in sociology (cf. Glaser 1978 & 1989; Charmaz 2006; Pieterse 2010).
  - The “open coding” system was an inductive process, identifying categories in sermons and using them to develop an analytical model of the Prosperity Gospel: The most prominent parts of the P G were emphasised and compared. Out of this process a construction of a theory of the preaching of the P G was formed. This was called “open coding” and it was an inductive analysis of what the preacher claimed, taught, appealed to and admonished, etcetera. The research was a qualitative analysis of these sermons on the Prosperity Gospel.
  - A wider study could also delineate different theological approaches, for example, a Reformed, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal or Anglican emphasis, but in the thesis the research was restricted to the claimed charismatic approach, emphasising the living Word through the energising work of the Holy Spirit. This

was still in line with Van der Laan's approach as Pieterse outlined it, characterising preaching as divine-human dynamics, consisting of *kerugmatic* dynamics, interpretive dynamics and eschatological dynamics – the past, present and future dimensions (cf. Van der Laan 1989:184; Pieterse 2010:98).

- Further conceptual elaboration of the meanings of the main categories, exposing the heart of the matter in prosperity preaching, concluded according to John 10:10, were delineated:

“Faith”: Christ promised “life in abundance”; Christians can and must *believe* God's covenant promises of provision of material prosperity, and apply that belief in practice with claims, normally through prayer, but also as a “medium” (compare the evaluation of Pastor O E Oyedepo).

“Claim”: Christ's promise of a blessed life has to be claimed as a prerogative by all Christians and they must exercise their right to material wealth with practical claims according to his promises – it was basically a “right” to possess and own “abundance”.

“Abundance”: Christ promised not only “life”, but especially “life in abundance”: this meant more than normal support to survive, as it mentioned material extravagance as a prerogative for all Christians.

Subsequently, these concepts were constructed by way of a synthesis into a theory of the Prosperity Gospel, delineating it with the main characteristics of this “material wealth gospel”.

The research delineated the process of the “open coding” model of the sermons according to the following sections:

- Data collection
- Analysis and construction of categories
- Central ideas of the Prosperity Gospel according to John 10:10, Faith, claims and abundance

- The synthesis of the overall theology of the Prosperity Gospel.

An analysis and evaluation of the sermons, according to the system, is included in the research. The process was as follows: DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND CONSTRUCTION OF CATEGORIES, AN EVALUATION OF THE CENTRAL IDEAS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND THE SYNTHESIS OF THE OVERALL THEOLOGY OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

## CHAPTER 4

### PROSPERITY PREACHING: A GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE CODES OF THE TEN SERMONS

This chapter analyses and evaluates the codes of the sermons to obtain a basic view of the sermons and the meaning thereof to be able to draw conclusions of these sermons in the following chapter.

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION: THE CODES OF ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

The scriptural text used as a model was John 10:10 for the 10 South African sermons analysed and evaluated. After the reading and analysis of the sermons this text was chosen as the most suitable for the model of the contents of the sermons: “I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance, to the full, till it overflows” (Amplified Bible).

#### 4.2 AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF TEN SERMONS

##### BACKGROUND DATA OF PARTICIPATING PREACHERS

Name	Sermon Title	Gender	Age Group	Education	Province
Preacher A	The principles of Multiplication	M	Elderly	High	Kwazulu Natal
Preacher B	The Key to Kingdom Empowerment	M	Middle	High	North West
Preacher C	Three Levels of Prosperity	M	Middle	Middle	Eastern Cape
Preacher D	God's Principles on First Fruits	M	Middle	Middle	Gauteng
Preacher E	Principle of the first fruit	M	Middle	High	Gauteng
Preacher F	You cannot serve God and Money	M	Middle	High	Kwazulu Natal
Preacher G	Stewardship	M	Middle	High	Western Cape
Preacher H	Principles for eliminateing poverty	M	Middle	Middle	Gauteng
Preacher I	There are no victories at Bargain Prices	F	Middle	Middle	Gauteng
Preacher J	Dominion	M	Young	Middle	Western Cape

## **PREACHER A**

### **SERMON TITLE: PRINCIPLES OF MULTIPLICATION**

**Prayer:** “I believe a deposit of revelation and anointing will be made from heaven into every life, into every individual person, and You will take everyone into a dimension of increase and multiplication that they never known before. I thank You today that everyone that is in this meeting is anointed to receive; and I agree and declare that they will mix faith with their hearing and the Word of God will profit them. We give You all the praise, honour and the glory. We ask it in Jesus’ Name. Amen.”

### **CLAIM**

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

The preacher expresses believe and declares that a revelation and anointing would be made from heaven in everybody’s life and that God would provide multiplication for each one. He thanks God and declares that everyone in the meeting is anointed to receive and to mix their faith with the Word.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

This is not a normal Christian prayer of requesting God to provide and to bless the congregation: It is kind of exaggeration of his own authority in prayer to state his believes that God would multiply riches for the congregation.

#### **FROM THE SERMON:**

**“Principle of multiplication in the book of Genesis:**

... I just want to share some testimonies with you that has happened in the last 7 or 8 years when we moved into our building. I think on a Sunday morning we had less than a hundred or two hundred people. In 7 to 8 years we have experienced a thousand fold increase numerically. God declares in the Book of Deuteronomy 1:11: “The Lord

your God will multiply you a thousand times.” I believe that God will multiply you a thousand times more than you are today. You will never be the same again; you are not just going for 30-fold, you are not going for sixty-fold, you are not going for a hundred-fold. I agree that you are going for a thousand times as many as you are today! Hallelujah, praise the Lord Jesus (CLAP). Our membership is approximately two thousand or a little bit more, and so we are experiencing a tremendous growth that we now have three services on a Sunday and we thank God for that.

Our income has grown 3 thousand per cent in 7 years; give the Lord a hand (CLAP). Hallelujah! In this 7 years it is going close to seven and a half million Rand a year; so, you can see while the church is growing numerically a thousand times, financially it has grown three thousand per cent. Meaning the financial power status of the people is growing 3 times the percentage of the numerical growth. Hallelujah! (CLAP) - because God is empowering us to prosper. Hallelujah!”

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher introduces the sermon title as the “principle of multiplication” in Genesis.
2. He testifies about approximately a 1000-fold increase in people attending church services in 7-8 years; they have grown to 2 000.
3. He quotes Deuteronomy: “...God will multiply you a thousand times”.
4. He claims that God would multiply the congregation 1000-times more than today, and he expresses thanks to God.
5. The preacher estimates that more than R 7.5 million is contributed to the church in tithes per year: An increase of 3 000%.
6. He claims that the financial power growth is three times the percentage of the numerical growth.
7. The preacher concludes that God is empowering the congregation to prosper.

## **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. The preacher draws the conclusion that as the people attending the services have increased a 1000-fold, this would automatically happen again in future another 1 000 times – no justification is provided.**
- 2. He merely applies an Old Testament text applicable to Israel as a nation at that stage, to a congregation after the New Testament, who has experienced the full gospel of Christ after the fulfilment of the Old Covenants – Christ introduced a New Covenant in his blood.**
- 3. The preacher's conclusion is simply a wish or speculation not founded in the gospel of Christ.**
- 4. In general: This section of the sermon falls under the topic of FAITH, whereas the faith expressed here is not in God as the father of Jesus and the revelation of the New Testament gospel of the cross and resurrection. The preacher merely used the history of Israel as it is stated in Deuteronomy to draw applicable conclusions of regarding numerical and financial growth of the congregation from his human point of view and anthropocentric claims.**

## **ABUNDANCE**

### **FROM THE SERMON:**

**“I stand here as a millionaire. I am not a broke pastor; I was a broke pastor, but I am not anymore (CLAP). Hallelujah. My car alone is worth a million rand, but I didn't start there, I started with 2 and 3 thousand Rand a month. I started where you are, I told you last year; and this year it's time for me to move on again; every time I have to move on my knees start to shake. Last year, and this year my tithes alone in the local church, is R15, 000 per month. So you can work that out to see how much income is coming in from building my faith to go there.**



How many of you know it is good to be wealthy? (CLAP) It is wonderful to have more than enough and its available to every one of you if you do what I do. God is not a respecter of persons; He will give you what I have.

My friend I have nothing against business; it causes ministers to *be kings in the market place*; it's wonderful too. But God has called me to be a priest in the church for this period of time. So what I am talking about tithing R15, 000 a month is not from a business that I have, it's from the principles of sowing and reaping."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher states he is a millionaire and has a car valued at R1 million, but started with an income of between R2, 000 and R3, 000. He claims that he is moving further into riches.
2. His tithes is R15 000 per month in the local church as he believes in "sowing and reaping". This is building his faith.
3. The preacher asks how many congregants know how good it is to be wealthy.
4. The preacher promises that there is enough for everyone if they apply the same principles he has.
5. The preacher says that God will give them the same abundance he has, if they do what he does. God is not a "respecter of persons". He claims boldly that God will give them what he has.
6. He claims that there are ministers living as "kings in the market place", which is "wonderful". He states that he is a minister only for "this period of time" and implies that he might be in "business" in the context of his statement regarding the market place.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher presents himself as an example for the congregation as a millionaire owning a car of R1 million in an ego-centric way. Nobody in the congregation is in the same position and circumstances as the pastor. There are reasons why he is so rich and why he obtained the money where he obtained it – he does not reveal these reasons and the background of his finances. He simply claims that it is because of “his belief in sowing and reaping”. This creates a false picture of finances and of God’s blessings in the congregation.
2. He makes a bold, but unwise claim that if they did what he has done, they would also become as rich as he is. He applies the general claim, which is consequently distorted, that God is not a respecter of persons, without explaining where this comes from and what the context and meaning of those words are.
3. He evaluates the business world unconditionally positive, and even implies that he is only for “this period” a pastor. He endorses the practice as “wonderful” that pastors are also “kings” as business people enriching themselves, which goes against the grain of the gospel as exemplified by the lives of Jesus, Paul and the New Testament Christians, for example.
4. In general: This section falls under the topic of ABUNDANCE, where abundance of wealth is presented as the norm for Christians, simply and exclusively because of the Old Testament promise to Israel in a specific situation and under a different covenant and era, and a generalisation of “sowing and reaping”, without its context and exegesis: This is not the emphasis of the gospel of Christ.

## **PREACHER B**

**SERMON TITLE: THE KEY TO KINGDOM EMPOWERMENT**

**“There is this Word in the Bible called peace or ‘*shalom*’; it is having security in the midst of turmoil. God will give you peace, give you peace around you; I have given you peace without any money, given you peace; your family have been broken down, people expected they will see you walking on the street mad because of your situation; they will find you at peace, that is ‘*shalom*’. It comes to a person because of tithing.**

**Amen, ‘*shalom*’ - it’s a Hebrew word for peace and it’s a *Hebrew word for prosperity*. It’s a Hebrew word for *continuous well-being*. There are certain ways which God has blessed, when you read Genesis 12 from verse 1 to 4, when He said to Abraham, leave your native country, your relatives, your father’s family and go to the land that I shall show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, make you famous and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on the earth will be blessed through you. I will bless you, but you have to leave from all your customs, from your people, I will bless you. God was saying if I have to speak the language that you may understand, God was saying I will strengthen you; you will be famous, you will have dignity, you will be listened to, and you will be a blessing to others. People will be blessed because of you, if you can listen to me and leave, then I will bless you! You can be a girl that is blessed by God; listen, there are rich people, but they are not blessed; successful people, who are blessed, they are prosperous.”**

## **FAITH**

### **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher explains the meaning of “*shalom*” in the Bible as security in turmoil.**
- 2. He says that God would provide a *faithful tither* “*shalom*” or peace in all circumstances.**

3. He emphasises that in Hebrew *“shalom”* denotes continuous well-being or prosperity.
4. He uses Gen. 12: 1-4 where Abraham has to leave his native country, etc., but with God’s *“shalom”*.
5. He clarifies that God would strengthen and bless Abraham; some people are rich,  
but not blessed with continuous well-being.
6. The preacher concludes that God will bless and make prosperous those who follow Him and obey His commands, and also make them a blessing.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. It is generally accepted that the concept *“shalom”* indicates comprehensive well-being in the Old Testament, but not necessarily for those who are always in turmoil, and also not because of what you give to God, or tithing: There is no indication of that in any promise. Consequently, this approach is speculation or an unfounded *human* promise.
2. He uses Abraham as one who is this “prosperous” person, whereas Abraham’s narrative indicates also difficult times for Abraham, despite God’s *“shalom”* or peace in his life.

#### **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “The Lord came to Abraham and said I want to bless you... You were saved to succeed, you were saved to prosper; how many of you are coming? Because, the blessing of God gives you supernatural ability to overcome any circumstance, challenge and obstacle.

God rejoices when you succeed; the Bible says he rejoices when you are blessed, even when you go to political meetings. When you are blessed you are in charge

because you are blessed. You don't need unseen prayers. Don't you know that the Bible says money answers all things; you need money. You are seated there for me to preach that very hard word, I need money. You see the seat you are seated upon, its money and you need it; you need money. I need it.

God said to Abraham I will bless you... I know my dad will give it to me, my dad will do (another language) my dad will do (another language) my dad will buy (another language) when I need a car (another language) my debts are paid (another language) I go to my dad, my debts are paid, if I go to my *El Shaddai*, the God who is more than enough. *El Shaddai*, the God who is more than enough (another language) and God says I will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says the Lord came to Abraham to bless him: He was "saved to succeed", and "saved to prosper". This is not applicable unconditionally to any person today.
2. He claims that the blessings of God provide us with supernatural capability to overcome any circumstances or obstacles. He claims that the Bible says, "Money answers all things" and then there's no need for prayer. He does not indicate where this is stated and it is not true.
3. He claims that we know that God will give us whatever we need; He will pay our debts, buy us cars, and God is called *El Shaddai*, meaning "God is more than enough". This is far-reaching human speculation.
4. The preacher says that God has told us that He will supply all our needs according to His riches.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher interprets *shalom*, the blessing of the Lord one-sidedly in terms

of prosperity.

2. He claims that the blessings of the Lord will provide victory over any obstacles or circumstances, but this is exclusive one-sidedly from a financial point of view, as he alleges falsely that money “answers all things”.
3. It is an unchristian approach to maintain that when God’s blessing is on you, *you need not pray*.
4. The translation of the Hebrew word *El Shaddai* is that God is the “all-sufficient One”; this apply to life in general and not only to financial needs. It is clear that the believers cannot claim abundant riches because their Saviour is *El Shaddai*; it does also not necessarily indicate that if Abraham was blessed with certain specific blessings that those blessing apply to all Christians in all circumstances. For instance, this is not the example that Paul sets before us: God would supply in all our needs, but that does not necessarily mean abundance in riches.

## ABUNDANCE

From the sermon: “The Bible says Jesus was made a curse for us, He was made poor that the people may become rich; if you don’t enter, then I will enter. You will talk about me, my name will be famous, not because I’m a preacher, but because I tithe, I give. I’ve read the scripture that says give and it shall be given back to you good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, men will give unto you. God will cause people to come and give to your life. Not because you’re a pastor, you’ll get a tender and get it from the heathens, not because you are a pastor, because you are a tither, because you are partnering with God and because you understand that, whatever God gives you , there is something called a tithe, which you have to give back to God.”

## AN ANALYSIS:

1. The preacher teaches that Jesus was made a curse for us, meaning that Jesus was made poor that we may become rich.
2. The preacher says that people will talk about him and that his name will be famous because he is a faithful tither and he is “partnering” with God.
3. He says that you “have to give back to God” and then people will come and give to you. You will “get a tender...because you are a tither”.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. Jesus was certainly not made poor that all Christians would become abundantly rich and that they would be blessed in grand prosperity; this is a gross aberration from the gospel. The insinuation is that those who are not abundantly wealthy did not obey the conditions to be extremely rich: He calls these “rules”, “partnering with God” and “tithing”. Christians are already “children of God” and Jesus called them His “brothers and sisters” in the covenant of Jesus’ blood as He instituted the New Covenant in His blood with the Lord’s Supper. In the gospel there is no need or law to partner with God apart from this. In this New Covenant in the New Testament the tithe is understood to be very controversial and it is clear that nowhere is it required in so many words. The gospel proclaims that God loves an abundant donor in the New Testament.
2. The fact that the preacher mentions “tenders” to be received, as an example of God’s blessings in reply to tithing, borders on blasphemy in the South African situation, where it has become publicly and abundantly clear that many tenders were unjustly, and not according to the laws of the country, provided to “friends” and family with evil intentions to enrich individuals and to take brides.

#### **PREACHER C**

## **SERMON TITLE: THE THREE LEVELS OF PROSPERITY**

### **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “If you do not believe that it is God’s plan to bless you, you will not be wealthy. You have to believe. Just as much as you cannot enter salvation unless you believe that Jesus Christ is able to save you. Many people walk in sickness because they don’t believe that Jesus can heal. And so, you cannot walk in the blessing, unless you believe that Jesus can bless you too. So, you have to be renewed in your mind by faith.

If you are in debt right now: If you are bonded with vehicle financing, credit cards, and so forth: Firstly, let me share with you: How do you know that you have a financial problem? Can somebody tell me? When your expenses exceeds your income, than you know you have challenges.

Do you know that most Christians are in that predicament, and do absolutely nothing about it, and just have faith that God is going to take them out of it, and if there is no works to your faith, your faith has become a funeral. I like the Afrikaans scripture about that; it just carries so much more weight to it. For where I am it says, ‘*Nader tot God en Hy sal tot jou nader*’. When you seek God’s counsel, pertaining to these things, God will show up and make you wise.”

### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says that if you do not believe that it’s God’s plan to bless you, you will not be wealthy.
2. He claims that you have to believe that Jesus will save you and bless you.



3. He states that often Christians are in a financial predicament and do not do anything about it, with disastrous results.
4. He says that Christians must have faith to take them out of these circumstances.
5. He promises that we should move closer to God and He will move closer to us.
6. The preacher claims if you seek God's counsel, pertaining to financial predicaments, God will assist to make you wise.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher's point of departure is a person's *belief* in God and his blessings. He makes a general statement that people are not wealthy because they do not trust God. This approach is not from the gospel, and if it might be, it was not pointed out in the sermon. Consequently, it is merely a general statement with no gospel foundation.
2. He compares belief for healing with trusting God for riches and makes the point that people have to take responsibility for their beliefs, and the outcome with healing and becoming rich, would be according to their faith. Again, this is put forward as human common knowledge without any justification of the gospel.
3. The preacher uses a text about approaching God in James with the promise that He would then approach you: His point is that if you are in a financial predicament you have "to do something" about it, presumably to approach God. He does not state this, however, as he claims that faith is not enough to get you out of the dilemma, but that there has to be "works to your faith", which he does not explain and it remains vague. There is no conclusion to this argument, and he left it hanging in the air, without indicating what these works are, or what you have to do according to the gospel.

4. Eventually, after these general arguments the preacher directs you to seek God's counsel, and he claims that God would assist you with wisdom. This, however, is so general that it is neither here nor there regarding assistance to solve your predicaments in financial matters.

From the sermon: "God's promises: I will never forget how I got entangled with a clothing account. I needed a pair of tackies; it was a simple form, fill in your name and address, and I got the pair of tackies; I got out of that place. It felt so easy to open an account, I mean there was a red hanger sale on and I got the account. And six years later, I was still paying off on the pair of tackies: It just did not finish. We had an access bond; they started with the access loan, whereby if you pay off R1000 you can have that amount immediately available through the auto bank: You're buying bread from a home loan.

And I knew that if God had not come into this thing, there's just no way I would be able to preach the gospel. There is no way I would have been able to stand in his call. There's just no way I would have been able to respond, that I know that all of heaven is available to me and I knew I was anointed and gifted, and I knew I was called and I knew I was saved. And I could not have this challenge financially."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher explains how easy it was to become ensnared in a debt trap.
2. He says he knew he would not be able to preach the gospel if he did not allow God to assist him with his debts.
3. He says that there was no way out of his dilemma unless he responds to God's call to assist him with his finances.
4. The preacher says that he knows that "all of heaven" is available to him and as he was anointed and gifted for the ministry he had to get out of his debts.

## **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. The preacher confuses God's provision with simple wisdom of finances and debts. He could have asked God for wisdom not to become ensnared in debts. He makes this a major issue of his pastoral work of preaching with an assumption that if God does not deliver him of his debts he could not preach. No! We cannot wait until we have enough wisdom or 'n sinless life to become witnesses to Christ, or to preach God's blessings according to the gospel and the will of Christ, also regarding finances.**
- 2. His approach is unscriptural that he could only be a pastor in Christ's service if "heaven", which is "available" to him, opens up with financial blessings regarding his debts. The apostle Paul, for example, struggled with finances and he set the example of trusting the Lord as he fulfilled his ministry. "...if we are troubled, afflicted and distressed, it is for your comfort, consolation and encouragement and for your salvation; and if we are comforted, consoled and encouraged, it is for your comfort, consolation and encouragement, which works in you when you patiently endure the same evils, misfortunes and calamities that we also suffer and undergo (2 Cor. 1:6).**

## **ABUNDANCE**

**From the sermon: "God has granted me that anointing for business; we've laid hands on people, and we have seen the anointing transferred and empowerment coming upon individuals. We've had two individuals in church, one Sunday morning in the Visha Hall. I called upon them and I said to the two of them: 'There's anointing, a millionaire's anointing upon you this morning. Would you come? I want to give it to you.' They both came; I laid hands on them. The one was running a medical aid business and he became the second biggest medical aid business in the Eastern Cape; and the other one brought me the seed of a millionaire, brought me the seed.**

Today I have my own aircraft; my own pilot. This year alone we have sown away in excess of a million Rand as seed, as tithes, personal tithes. I think my personal tithes for this year alone is already R 1.6 million. I don't know where you are, but I do know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

I want to introduce to you the God that can take away shame, remove the yokes, take away the burdens and he is making an invitation. 'Come unto me, all those that are heavy laden and I will give you rest.'"

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says that God has granted him an "anointing for business".
2. He says they have seen the anointing transferred to others by the laying on of hands.
3. He testifies about individuals in the church becoming anointed to be millionaires by "laying on" of hands. He has his own aircraft and pilot.
4. He has sown approximately R1.6 million in personal tithes over the past year.
5. He invites the congregation to take up an introduction to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
6. He says that Christ said all those who are burdened, financially, should come unto Him and He will give them rest.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher does not explain how God granted him "anointing for business". There is no reference to the scriptures and no justification for it.
2. He mentions experiences where people were anointed by the laying on of hands for wealth: In the scriptures there are no references of this action, not to mention "to become millionaires".

He testifies that he was blessed with an aircraft and pilot as if this was God's direct action in his life as part of prosperity from God without any gospel explanation or justification.

3. He mentions his tithes as an explanation why God has blessed him with riches, without any foundation of the gospel of Christ or references to the Bible.
4. He mentions that he knows "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" as if that is the foundation for wealth and this for a church which is supposed to be a New Testament church of Christ.
5. He merely assumes God would make people rich if they come to Jesus to take away their burdens, applying it to financial burdens towards wealth.
6. In general this is not a Christian sermon from the gospel of Christ – it is simply human predictions and desires towards riches, mixing it with vague references to "anointing" and "God's blessings".

#### **PREACHER D**

##### **SERMON TITLE: GOD'S PRINCIPLES ON FIRST FRUITS**

"Abraham had an encounter with God earlier, remember. God came to Abraham who was in the South of Iraq. Abraham is not a Jew, not an Israeli, he is an Iraqi. God introduces himself to Abraham, who doesn't know who God is, because where he was raised, he was raised to worship the moon-god. He knows nothing about Jehovah, God in the process of time, he got to know Jehovah, God; and God says to him, come out of your country, come out of your land to a place that I will show you. And in essence, God says, if you will trust me with your life, just like God says to you: If you will trust me with your life I'll do great things. Abraham, the Bible said, believed God who has come for his righteousness; and in Genesis 12, God made a covenant with Abraham. God saw Abraham succeeding, prospering. His was so rich as well as his nephew, Lot; he and Abraham were in one geographical place, both of them are so

blessed by God, they have so many resources that Abraham has to tell Lot, 'please move'. 'Gauteng' is too small for my resources, go to 'Limpopo' and Lot moved and we saw Abraham as well as the resources he got. He refused other people to give him anything and the little he had God blessed; God multiplied it. Then, Lot was attacked by another nation, Abraham heard of it, and ran over to defend Lot; by the hand of God Lot was delivered.

Abraham comes back, being victorious in the battle. The covenant of God - God had blessed him mentally, and that one day as Abraham came back from the battle and is having all these things he has made a covenant with God: He has got livestock, he got silver and gold. In Hebrews chapter 7 the Bible says Abraham met Melchizedek, and he blessed Abraham, who gave him a tenth of all, after he came back from the battle; and this was 430 years before the law. So tithing was not a practice that was introduced by the Law of Moses, tithing came as a spontaneous response from somebody, who had been helped by God. See when we tithe we are saying to God, God you've been good to me. When we tithe, we are saying, God because you have kept me I'm not going to forget you. When we are tithing we are saying God all that I have I ascribed to you because God's biggest challenge to us as human beings is that once He prospers us, once He blesses us, will we remember (Zulu), the biggest challenge to us human beings, we suffer from amnesia; we forget how God has brought us through."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher tells us how God came to Abraham.
2. He states that God made a covenant with Abraham and made him prosperous.
3. He mentions that God prospered Abraham and his family so much that Abraham has asked Lot to move from that area.
4. He declares that God multiplied the few belongings that Abraham had.

5. He teaches how God assisted Abraham to go and deliver Lot from his enemies.
6. God gave Abraham livestock, silver, gold and victory in battle.
7. He claims that tithing to Melchizedek was not in practice as a law, but it was a spontaneous response to God's blessing.
8. The preacher remarks that the challenge is that once God prospers us, we forget how God has assisted us and we do not tithe.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The problem of the preacher's approach to, and interpretation of, the narrative of Abraham, Lot and Melchizedek is that he takes the events as a norm for all time and also for the church today. These events and figures are parts of the on-going historic revelation of God and cannot be "frozen" and made into an absolute rule for all time and people.
2. There is in the New Testament no strict and causal relationship between our dedication to God and the blessings of God to us – we are saved by grace, without God taking account of merits. Of course God expects thankfulness and appreciation for what he has done, but that is not a law and a norm to be followed; it is love out of thankfulness. When Jesus healed 10 lepers and one came back to thank him and worship him, Jesus asked, where the other nine healed lepers were.
3. Whether the "tithing" was a part of the culture before Israel, or whether it was instituted by the law of Israel, the point is that after Christ came and redeemed his church, the law and its prescriptions were fulfilled by the cross of Christ. "For if we are in Christ" neither living under the law or without the law and its prescriptions and rituals and rites mean anything, "but only faith..." (Gal. 5:6).

#### **CLAIM**

**From the sermon: “Nothing is wrong with you being like Abraham, nothing wrong with you being like Job, nothing is wrong with you being like the rich young ruler. Did you know that the grave of Jesus was donated by a rich man? The tomb in which Jesus was buried, it was a rich man who donated it, and there is nothing wrong with that. God is not against people who have resources; God is just saying that money shouldn’t have you.”**

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher claims that there was nothing wrong with being wealthy like Abraham, Job or the young ruler who came to Jesus to be saved.**
- 2. He says that Jesus’ grave was donated by a rich man.**
- 3. He teaches that there is nothing wrong with being wealthy.**
- 4. The preacher says God is not against people who have resources.**
- 5. The preacher makes the point that God does not wish that money should “have us”, that is, have the control of our lives.**

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. Although there have been many rich Christians and although there are many today, there is no New Testament rule, norm or idea that all Christians have to be blessed by God with extreme wealth. In fact there are severe warnings about being rich. In fact, Jesus called riches “deceitful”: “”...the cares of the world and the pleasure and delight and glamour and deceitfulness of riches choke and suffocate the Word, and it yields no fruit” (Matt. 13:22). Jesus warns harshly that “...where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”; and He admonishes us, “Do not gather up and heap up and store for yourselves treasures on earth...but...treasures in heaven...” (Matt. 6:19-21).**
- 2. The pastor does not discriminate between “needs” and “wants”, consequently, he interprets the Old Testament events as God blessing the believers in**



general with abundant wealth and applies that to all Christians. In Matt. 6: 33 Christ established the approach regarding “needs” that our heavenly Father would provide altogether for us if we put his kingdom first. There is no promise, law, rule or norm whatsoever, or the outcome of a covenant with God in the New Testament that God would provide abundant riches to Christians, according to their “wants”.

3. The point the preacher makes that “riches” must not “have” us, or control our lives is valid and important: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief’s” (1 Tim. 6:10).

## **ABUNDANCE**

From the sermon: “We are aware of people who have been prophesied over to give all their money to the church. People have been prophesied “out of” their money, prophesied” out of” their cars, prophesied “out of” all their resources. Sometimes people say, if you want to get a prophecy, you must give so much; the bigger the amount, the bigger the prophecy; the larger the amount, the more specific the prophecy. And it’s a practice that is there, particularly in churches like ours, which I would like to classify as charismatic. As well as there has been a lot of stories in the newspapers about how churches like ours receive a lot of funds, but there seems to be no development, no growth. That money is not channelled to do church things, instead it seems all that money went to the pastors’ bank accounts and some has gotten into living lavish lifestyles and not giving any account of their money, of the money of the church; and so these thing are very disturbing that we, men of the cloth, can do these kind of things; unfortunately when some things happen and people get abused in that way all of us who are pastors and ministers are lumped together and painted with the same accusations and same suspicion.”

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher mentions how people have prophesied to others to give all their money to the church.**
- 2. He reveals how people are encouraged to give more to receive more riches and detailed prophecies.**
- 3. He claims that often the money is not channelled to church projects, but to ministers' bank accounts, without any accountability.**
- 4. He alleges that this practice is becoming common in charismatic churches.**
- 5. He states that the churches receive a great deal of money, but there seems to be no development or growth in the churches.**
- 6. The preacher says the money is channelled towards lavish lifestyles of the pastors.**
- 7. The pastor claims that these abuses unfortunately lump all pastors together as if everybody is doing it.**

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. The preacher is aware of the abuses happening in the churches regarding money and the desire to become rich, affecting the pastors in the first place: What he does not seem to realise is that this type of exploitation originates exactly what the gospel warns about becoming rich, mentioned above. This horrific problem originates most of the time with the pastors, claiming to having special "powers" to prophecy, declare, or anoint people towards becoming rich, even millionaires, always with the condition that they have to contribute abundantly.**
- 2. This type of preaching about the blessing of God providing extreme wealth to those who contribute abundantly feeds into the fleshly desires of people to become abundantly rich and incites them to give away to the church much**

more than they can afford. This is making a mockery of the gospel and the promises of the blessings of the Lord.

3. The fact that many Christians lump all “prosperity preachers” together as abusers cannot only be blamed on the “innocent” believers, as *this type of preaching is basically the cause of the suspicion* to “paint” all “prosperity preachers” with the same “brush” of taking advantage of the innocent people, manipulation and exploitation.

## **PREACHER E**

### **SERMON TITLE: PRINCIPLE OF THE FIRST FRUIT**

“I want you to turn to Proverbs 3. We are going to read from verse 5. Now I want to ask you a question before we read the scriptures: Do you trust this God? Okay, you said yes, so, let’s go now to Proverbs verse 5, ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways; in all your ways acknowledge him and then He will direct your path’. Verse 9, ‘Honor, the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruit of all your increase, so that your barns may be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.’ You know this is a powerful scripture; I was reading this and I said to the Lord, “You say that I must honor you with my possessions and with the first fruit of all my increase’.”

### **CLAIM**

### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher refers to the scriptures and asks the congregation whether they trust this God.
2. He reads Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord... and then He will direct your path...” verse 9, “Honor the Lord with your possessions...so that your barns

may be filled with plenty...”

3. He teaches that the church should trust God also regarding their possessions.
4. The preacher teaches that the church must honour God with their possessions and with all their increase for God to bless them.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher challenges the congregation to trust the Lord in everything, also regarding their finances – this is commendable.
2. The problem with his sermon regarding Proverbs is that he does not delineate this part of the Old Testament in the light of God’s historical and preliminary revelation and action in the light of the full revelation in Christ’s gospel. This leaves many questions unanswered, for example, does this still apply to the New Testament Christians? If so, in what way and with which arguments, to show in the gospel of Christ that this is the case.
3. It is commendable to encourage the congregation to “trust God”, but in the light of the full revelation of the gospel of God, is this not to be done only through Christ as God’s final revelation as the Word of God: “The Word became flesh” (John 1:1); and God spoke finally “through His Son” (Hebr. 1:1). We do not know any other true God, apart from the father of Jesus Christ, and consequently, it is not preaching the gospel to encourage people to “trust” in an indefinite, imprecise and nebulous “God”.
4. The gospel of Christ is at stake if God “rewards” us because of our financial sacrifices to Him, blessing us with extreme wealth. We are solely blessed in and through Jesus Christ, who earned these blessings from God, and died on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. Merely out of thankfulness we serve the Lord also with our possessions.

#### **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “A Claim on God’s promises: The book of Haggai - you don’t have to turn there. I want you to listen to this verse, Haggai chapter 2, ‘For thus says the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord...The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord...The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, says the Lord...and in this place will I give peace, says the Lord of hosts.’

Now, we believe that this God is not a liar and that He is able to do exceedingly and abundantly above all that we can think or ask, I want to ask you this question, is it then worth my while to trust this God? What a mighty God we serve! Angels bow before him, heaven and earth adores Him, what a mighty God we serve! He says, I will shake heaven and earth for you, but there’s a condition. The Bible says in Ephesians 3: 20, ‘Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.’ listen to me, people, God is able to do exceedingly above what you can ever think, what are you thinking right now? He’s able to do above that.”

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says that the Lord “will shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come.” God filled His house with glory (Haggai 2).
2. All the silver and gold in the house is God’s possession (Haggai 2).
3. God will give peace in this house (Haggai 2).
4. The preacher states that he believes that God is not a liar.
5. He teaches that God is able to do exceedingly and abundantly above all that we can think or ask of Him.
6. He asks whether it is worth to trust this God.
7. He declares that the God we serve is a mighty God. God would move heaven

and earth for us, but that there is a condition. He does not spell out the condition, but only mentions a text in Ephesians 3:20.

8. He reads Ephesians 3:20 that God is able to do more than all we can ask for or imagine according to His power which is at work in us.
9. He asks what we are thinking right now about this promise, but does not elaborate on the question.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher does not explain the background and context of Haggai and simply quotes the text arbitrarily and haphazardly. He does not fit it into the continuous revelation of God in Israel, culmination in Christ in the New Testament.
2. His whole approach is that God is almighty, He owns all the riches and all that the congregation has to do is to trust him, on the basis of the pronouncements to be blessed by God with extreme wealth.
3. He quotes Ephesians to indicate that God can bless extremely above our expectations; the assumption is that the blessing is with wealth. Again, he is not doing exegesis on, or an explanation of, the text and merely uses the words to fit into his line of thinking that we need only to trust this wonderful God to bless us, in a sense automatically, with abundant material possessions. This nearly sounds like an anthropocentric formula to use towards riches for all, if they believe it.

#### **ABUNDANCE**

From the sermon: "I have been tithing for 10 years now since I've been a Christian but, how come I am not blessed? Why don't I see abundance in my life, even though I am a faithful tither? The Lord said why you have not been blessed in terms of

abundance is because you have never honored me with your first fruits. I'll explain what the Bible means. If you get your first salary and you bring it to the Lord, I'm going to make it very simple, your total salary is R3000; the Lord says that R3000 is mine. Do you understand what we are saying? Because it is your first fruit, but the Holy Spirit told me the reason why people are not experiencing abundance is because when they received their first fruit they took 10% of the first fruit and gave it to the Lord; is that right? But the minute you take 10% and give it to the Lord, you just blocked the abundance of the 90% which means this is getting now, interesting now, the Holy Spirit says to me, now I want to show you how it will effect your life, if you haven't given me the first fruit of your income which is 100% not 10% you have taken the 10% out and you've kept the 90%."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says he has been tithing for 10 years since he became a Christian.
2. He questions why he is not blessed, and why he cannot see evidence of abundance even as a faithful tither.
3. He claims that he has not been blessed as he never honoured God with his "first fruits".
4. He declares that his "first fruit" was his entire first salary.
5. The reason why they do not experience abundance is because they contribute only 10% of their first salaries as their "first fruits".
6. The preacher alleges that by contributing only 10% as "first fruits", they block the abundance of 90% of God's superfluous blessing.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. This approach of the preacher to delineate the rules and laws of the Old

Testament at a specific historical time of the revelation of God and apply them to the Christian congregation is not only bordering on legalism; it is adhering to the letter of the law of the Old Covenant, which was fulfilled in Christ by the blood of His cross (Galatians).

2. To bind the Christians to a legalistic interpretation of meticulous laws of the Old Testament, in view of Christ stating that He has started a New Covenant in His blood is a denial of the gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul states emphatically that if he still preaches the Old Testament law, the cross of Christ is made meaningless and is done away with (Galatians 5), and "...if you are guided by the Holy Spirit, you are not subject to the Law", the law of the Old Testament.
3. To be in the right standing with God as the preacher claims through "the adherence of the law of first fruits" is a rejection of the gospel of Christ. "We know that a person is in the right standing with God not by the works of the Law, but only through faith and reliance on and adherence to and trust in Jesus Christ...because by keeping legal rituals and by works no person can ever be put in the right standing with God" (Gal. 2:16, Amplified Bible). "For I...in Christ's death for me...died to the Law and all the Laws' demands on me, so that I may live to and for God...For if acquittal from guilt comes through observing the ritual of the Law, then Christ died groundlessly and to no purpose and in vain. His death was then wholly superfluous" (Gal. 2:19 21, Amplified Bible).
4. According to the gospel it is a curse to be still under the rituals of the law, for example, "first fruits" and "tithes", after Christ died for us: "Christ purchased our freedom from the curse of the Law and its condemnation by becoming a curse for us..." Now that Christ has come we are no longer under the Law (Gal. 3:25).
5. The preacher makes God's blessings, also regarding wealth, dependent on the



obedience of the law. The gospel of Christ, however, undeniably states that we are "...not relying on the Law but through the Holy Spirit's help by faith anticipate and wait for the blessing and good for which our right standing with God...causes us to wait" Gal. 5:5, Amplified Bible).

6. The approach of the sermon is the obedience to the Law to receive God's blessings. Paul pleads from the gospel, "...how can you turn back again to weak and beggarly and worthless elementary things of all religions before Christ came, whose slaves you once more want to become? ... "I beg of you, become as I am free from the bondage of Jewish ritualism and ordinance...(Gal. 4:9, 12, Amplified Bible).
7. The preacher makes God's abundance in wealth completely dependent on meticulous obedience to the "law", as he claims that God did not bless him with his donations of these tithes only, but he had to give his "first fruits". For a New Testament congregation we have to ask, "What about God's blessings, also regarding financial support?" *"...you are no longer a slave, but a son and daughter, then it follows that you are an heir by the aid of God, through Christ"* (Gal. 4:7, Amplified Bible).

## **PREACHER F**

### **SERMON TITLE: YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MONEY**

"But the seed on the good soil are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and a good heart. I like this, 'honest and good heart'. Hold it fast and they bear fruit with perseverance. Does it take perseverance to be faithful in finances? Does it take serious commitment? Do you have to make a resolve, a decision, a resolve in your heart that we are going to be faithful about finances? Yes or no? I really believe, listen to me! I really believe God is challenging us, to come to this.

Many of you have been faithful and consistent and I want to say and release to us

prophetically that the maximum reaping, the maximum yield that your seeds could bear, are now going to be borne. Simply because of your diligence, the honesty of your heart, the integrity with which you function and give, God is going to honour that. God is not a man that he should lie.”

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher tells us to preserve the seed in the parable of the sower, and bear fruit with perseverance in donating.
2. He asks whether it takes perseverance to be faithful in donations, indicating a positive answer.
3. He believes God is challenging us into a place of complete financial productiveness in giving.
4. He tells us that many of us are faithful in maximum giving and reaping.
5. He tells us that diligence, honesty and integrity will be honoured by God.
6. The preacher claims that God is not a man that He should lie regarding wealth.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher misses the whole point of the Sower, about “Jesus sowing”, by applying it exclusively to the financial contributions of the seed on the good soil. The point of the exegesis is that Christ’s gospel falls on different types of “soil” with different reactions from people to the gospel. He oversteps the borders of the gospel by insisting exclusively on “perseverance...in finances”, “serious commitment” to contribute, “a resolve...to be faithful about finances”, “to come to “complete productiveness in... finances” and “God is challenging us” to come to this decision of giving abundantly.
2. He claims that from this text he can conclude that God would honour the “honesty and the integrity” of those who “give” generously: God would not “lie”. How can the pastor speak on behalf of God claiming the gospel and

especially this text on the sower sowing on different pieces of ground, applying it to diligent “giving” and “maximum reaping”? Where does the text, even his quotation of the restricted text, say that we will reap maximally?

## **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “Proverbs 11:24, 25 says ‘There is one who scatters and yet increases the more’, I like this verse...one guy is scattering his seed, giving, giving, giving, it’s almost a paradox, he scatters, but he increases more, the one who gives, increases... Get it into your system, there’s the person who scatters, increases; he who withholds lands up in want; the generous soul will be made prosperous, and he who waters of himself will be watered also.”

## **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher quotes Proverbs that the one who scatters receives more.
2. He explains how people scattering more seed, obtain more income.
3. He claims that those who withhold end up wanting.
4. He states that the generous will be made prosperous.
5. The preacher says that he who “waters of himself will be watered also”.

## **AN EVALUATION:**

1. These are beautiful verses in Proverbs 11:24 & 25, and it is also confirmed in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians 9:10, “God who provides seed for the sower and bread for eating will also provide and multiply your resources for sowing and increase the fruits of your righteousness...” This means that God will give such an increase of the “fruits of the earth” that we have not only bread sufficient to eat for one year, but enough “to sow again” for a future supply.
2. The preacher has to remember that these blessings of God to increase income

and make people economically more self-sufficient does not mean that God honours a person who gives willingly and generously with an accumulation of riches in the face of the poor – there is something fundamentally and spiritually wrong to be a millionaire with a massive amount of poor people in dire need around you.

3. Regarding Old Testament texts, there are comments in the following section, “An evaluation”.

## **ABUNDANCE**

From the sermon: “Isaac became rich, he continued to grow richer and he became very wealthy. And I liken this in terms of he got thirty-fold, went to sixty- and then to a hundred-fold in terms of the faithful disposition and the perseverance, the consistency of his heart. In terms of John 15, Jesus said you must bear fruit and later in the passage, He said you must bear more fruit and your fruit must grow to much fruit. And really speaking, that’s why I haven’t put rows here, just one column on the fullness of tithes, first fruits and offerings and your faithfulness in that, I believe God is going to give a reward to those who have faithfully persevered, over the years; that’s the impression that I have. In mathematical terms, for those of you who are mathematicians here a hundred fold is literally 10 000% increase. 60 fold is 6 000% increase and 30 fold is 3 000% increase.

It says in Genesis 26 Isaac sowed in that land and he reaped in the same year: What? A Hundred-fold and the Lord blessed him. This was like very quick reaping. He sowed and in the same year he reaped a 100-fold; this was by the way in a time of famine and his blessing was so powerful. I like what it says, the man became rich, continued to grow rich, richer, until he became very wealthy, OK? He had possessions of flocks, herds and a great household. He was so rich that the Philistines even envied him.”

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher says Isaac became rich and continued to grow wealthier.**
- 2. He explains that this was a growth in wealth of 30-, 60- and 100-fold because of his faithful disposition and consistency of dedication.**
- 3. He says we must bear a great deal of fruit.**
- 4. He says that we should be faithful in giving “tithes, first fruits and offerings”.**
- 5. He believes that God is going to give a reward to those who faithfully persevere in their giving.**
- 6. He teaches that in Genesis, Isaac sowed into the land, and that he was blessed a 100-fold in the same year.**
- 7. He says that Isaac became wealthy and had a great household, and that the blessing upon him was so great that the enemies of God began to envy him.**

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. The narrative of Isaac was a part of God’s continuing revelation towards the establishment of Israel and eventually the final revelation, the coming and work of Christ, the Messiah of Israel and the world. God’s revelation is an on-going disclosure of His plan which was fulfilled in Christ. The Bible is not regarded as the Qur’an, the “holy book” of the Muslims is regarded as written in heaven by their god, Allah, and revealed to Mohammed his prophet. There is no development in this so-called revelation – it was once and for all the same for all people and circumstances. Jahwe, the covenant God of Israel, however, was and is the God of history and his revelation in history is a developing narrative culminating in Christ as the norm of God’s will. Consequently, we cannot take a part of this historical revelation and absolutise it and make that a norm for all generations. If that is valid, then we still have to sacrifice in God’s temple, keep all the meticulous laws of Leviticus and circumcise people, which is ridiculous.**

Thus, we cannot claim the special blessings for the riches of Isaac as applicable to all Christians today. One has to explore the context exegetically and historically to detect God's reasons for doing that at that specific moment in the revelation history as part of his plan to move to Israel and eventually to Christ.

2. The approach of the pastor regarding Isaac's riches and his application thereof is not in line with the gospel of Christ.
3. The fruit of John 15 which Christ explained to be more and more after pruning, is not necessarily financial donations to churches; in fact, Jesus mentions the outcome of their fruit as prayer (verse 7), joy (verse 11), love to others (verse 12 & 17), obedience to God (verse 10), etcetera, and not financial donations.

## **PREACHER G**

### **SERMON TITLE: STEWARDSHIP**

"David, I call him Mr Praise, he knew how to praise God, when he wanted to give an offering like this. Who am I? And who are my people? Just come quickly here, I just want to make this illustration quick. I'll make sure you'll never forget this in your entire life. David says: 'Who am I? Who am I, my people that are able to give as willingly as this? He says "Lord, for what we have given you have given to us out of your hand'... In Afrikaans it says 'Wie is ek en wie is my Volk dat ons dan so aan U kan gee, want Here wat u ons gegee het, het U ons uit U hand gegee'... You see, you got to become established in giving. In fact the Bible says in 2 Corinthians, it says it like this, it says peace, or excel, excel means to ever *increase, it means to go beyond measure*. It means to always give more. He says, 'Just ensure that you excel in the gift of faith, knowledge'. He says, 'Also make sure that you excel in this grace of giving'. They say, how do you expect to grow? I say well, it is from faith to faith.

Paul says ‘Just as you expect to grow in faith and in knowledge, also make sure that you increase in this level of giving’; practically this is what it means, when I come to the Lord I can give five Rand, but I can’t serve God twenty years and give ten Rand. Because every increase means I have a vision, I have a goal. I’m going to give twenty Rand in every service; next time, I’m going to give fifty Rand in every service. I’m not going to give less than a hundred in every service, that’s my goal. God gives seed to sowers. If God knows you are a sower, He will place it in your hands. Hallelujah!”

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says that David knew how to praise God when he wanted to give an offering.
2. David said that what they had given was out of God’s hand.
3. He exhorts us to be established in our giving.
4. He proclaims that the Bible tells us to excel in our giving, and to excel means to “ever increase” and go beyond measure in our giving.
5. He teaches us to excel in the gift of faith and knowledge, and to expect growth from faith to faith.
6. He teaches us to make sure we excel in the “grace of giving”.
7. He claims that what we give shows that we have a “vision” and a “goal” to achieve.
8. He teaches that God provides “seed to sowers”.
9. The preacher says that if God knows we are “sowers”, He will place “more seed” in our hands.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher makes the point that what we give to Him is out of His hand, or coming from Him. This is obvious that everything we possess is from God, but to use this idea to exhort people to give continuously more and more is

transgressing the boundaries of these texts, and to pronounce human desires as the gospel.

2. The preacher is making vague statements from his personal point of view, for example, you must “become established in giving”. He does not provide a gospel foundation for this exhortation.
3. In a sense he quotes Paul in 2 Corinthians, but does not point out where Paul said this, but carries on to explain in details how the “giving” of the congregation must increase and grow all the time. This is not an exposition of the gospel of Christ. It is also not an exegesis of the text of the scriptures, as we are not allowed to claim the texts without taking into account the context, the situation and the original meaning and application of the original texts. If we do not follow the scriptures meticulously we cannot claim to preach the gospel.
4. Again, he makes the point to claim that what we give indicates our “vision and goal”, as if this is directly from God – it may be a good thought or a supportive encouragement to donate more to the church, but it is only a humanistic encouragement, coming from the thoughts of a person without additional authority or justification from the gospel.
5. He states that if God knows you are “a sower”, He will place seed in your hand. Where is this statement in the gospel? Furthermore, if it is in the gospel, what are the context and the original intention? The preacher mixes his own thoughts with the messages of the scriptures and proclaims his wishes as gospel.

## **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “Revelations 3:8 I will read one scripture and then I will get into the word. ‘I know thy works and behold I have set out before thee an open door, and no



man can shut it. For you have a little strength, and has kept my word and has not denied my name.'

When you come to the Lord, it does not mean when you come at that moment, your mind is renewed. That means when we come to the Lord, yes we receive the born again-status, that means:

- I get eternal life;
- I have the right, I don't necessarily have it experientially, but I have the right to access the promises of God. Are you with me?

So, you can know it now, you don't have to read from it, I'll quote it. Some people come to the Lord, they might not be multimillionaires, but just the change from a sinner to a saint changes the quality of your life; because God has an intention of increasing your quality of life."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher states that God knows our works and that He has set before us an open door, no one can shut.
2. He claims that God will set this open door, as we have kept His word without denying Him.
3. He teaches that if you come to the Lord, your minds are not immediately renewed.
4. He explains that when we come to the Lord we obtain eternal life.
5. He proclaims that when we come to the Lord we have the right of access to the promises of God.
6. The preacher says that God has the intention of increasing the quality of our lives.

## **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. It may be true for the preacher to proclaim that the Lord always has an agenda “to increase the quality of your life”, but he cannot speak on behalf of God to claim that that indicates that God wants you “to become millionaires”. He does not put these words in the context of the gospel, but aims only to apply the quality of life in the context of donations and giving with the vague promise of becoming millionaires.**
- 2. The preacher makes the obvious statement to say that if we follow the Lord the quality of our lives would change, but that does not necessarily mean that He would give abundant wealth to his children – the gospel has a different message, incorporating our whole life within the blessings of the Lord.**

## **ABUNDANCE**

**From the sermon: “Because by faith they obtain the promises and thoroughly understand I can pray and fast because something’s going to break when I pray and fast because there are dynamite and tools and principles in the kingdom that you can access, and all of it is to increase the quality of your life.**

**Now more so with giving, God never ask you something in the Bible that He does not intend to give back to you in multiplied fashion. That means now when you give to the Lord, God will never ask you for a sum, if He does not have the intention to give you more.”**

## **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher says that by faith we obtain the promises of God.**
- 2. He explains that by faith he can pray and fast for a breakthrough.**
- 3. He says that there are principles in the kingdom that can be accessed.**

4. He says that all these principles are to increase the quality of our lives.
5. He teaches us that God never intends to promise us things He does not intend to give back to us.
6. He teaches us that God promises to give back to us in a multiplied fashion.
7. The preacher says that when we give to God He will never ask a specific sum from us without the intention to give us more back.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher is not referring to the scriptures or indicate where the gospel proclaims the bold claim that “something is going to break” when I pray and fast because there are “dynamics and tools and principals” in the kingdom that you can access, and all of it is to increase the quality of your life. This is his wannabe thoughts applicable to riches that God would bestow on the congregation if they donate more and more.
2. The question to the preacher is, what are these “tools and principals” towards a financial breakthrough? Where is it indicated in the scriptures? This sounds as if he was establishing another “gospel” next to the gospel of Christ, obtaining “a breakthrough” through his fasting and prayers into the Kingdom of God, how to access riches by the authority and provision of God. If this is so it is simply blasphemy. This is the danger to preach human ideas, targeting the egoistic desires of poor dependent people desiring wealth – they are exposed and handed over in the hands of the preacher proclaiming vague thoughts as authoritative towards convincing them in the name of the highest authority to donate more and more.
3. He is claiming God to say or promise certain things regarding giving and rewards that is not in the context of the scriptures. It is only his anthropocentric or human approach and claims, for example, the “quality of your life” will increase, “more so with giving”; and, if you give to God, He has

the intention “to give you more”. These may be human hopes and desires, but it is not necessarily from the gospel.

4. The problem with this kind of preaching is that human desires and selfish cravings after wealth is mixed with vague references to the Bible and being claimed with the authority of the scriptures or even of God.

## **PREACHER H**

### **SERMON TITLE: PRINCIPLES FOR ELIMINATING POVERTY**

“The second law of prosperity is the law of the spoken word and faith. The Bible says the Spirit of the Lord moved on the face of the deep. You have to let God move your stuff: Say, ‘move my stuff’; come on, say that again. That’s what the government needs, the government needs God to move in their stuff; start moving the Reserve Bank, start moving. In various departments we need God to move in there. So, if you walk in the street you should pray for God to move there because wherever there is lack, God has to move: Lack has to be reversed by the Spirit of God, moving what Satan has destroyed, this God had to revive. So, you need God in your stuff to come in your marriage; come in your life, come in your business, come in your home, come in your wardrobe, come in my car, come into my fuel tank. God must move in my stuff. Say, ‘God must move in my stuff’ because God can move in your stuff. God can move where you think He should; He moves wherever He moves; in dark places He moves; where there is lack He moves; where there’s absence, shout, ‘move on my stuff’. Yes, oh yes, and He will; and when God moves on that stuff He’s preparing that stuff to receive the Word. Say, ‘the Word’.

When a person speaks the Word it is the Word of God spoken by faith that’s going to elevate lack into blessings, because when the earth was made it was made with abundance. Satan introduced a curse to destroy the earth. So, the first thing God

does now He brings the principle of abundance. He says, 'let there be light'. So, God speaks a Word in faith and when he speaks that Word in faith He releases vibrations; these vibrations change the content of the atmospheric condition; to cause darkness to be restrained; where-ever there is lack, lack must be revealed by revelation; this must reveal every area of lack in your life..."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher teaches that "the second law of prosperity" is the law of the spoken Word.
2. He tells us to ask God to move into "our stuff".
3. He teaches that the Word of God spoken by faith will transform "things" into blessings.
4. He discloses that the earth was created "in abundance".
5. He says that Satan introduced a curse to destroy the earth.
6. The preacher says that when he speaks a word in faith, God releases a change in the atmosphere that removes darkness and lack in every area of our lives.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher calls out "the second law of prosperity" as if it were written in the Bible, but he is not providing any reference or explanation of this claim.
2. He claims that we have "to call God into our stuff", whatever that may indicate, or whatever "stuff" may designate. It seems as if he assumes that "God moving into our stuff" means that God would take care of us and our circumstances, especially regarding problems. This, however, is not clear and it is definitely not an explanation of the gospel, but it sounds only as if it were only ramblings of a confused human brain
3. "To call God into stuff", is specified as if God would remove lack or poverty, for example. He must come into our homes, businesses and also into the petrol

tanks of our cars, presumably to bless us with abundant riches. For this to happen Christians have “to call out the Word”, apparently to let “God move into their stuff” and to bless them with abundant riches. Again, this line of thinking is proclaiming some authority, not from the gospel, but from another kind of “power-gospel” to enrich people and supply in all their needs. This not Christ-centred but anti-Christ.

4. In a sense it is true that the earth “was created in abundance”, but to state, because of natural abundance, the Christians should have abundant riches is far-fetched outside the gospel of Christ.
5. The way in which the preacher uses “the Word” is as if he and the Christians are supposed to be a kind of wizard with magic powers to move the world and wealth to be showered onto Christians in every way. This is seemingly making a fairylike, magician and sorcerer’s type of “power-gospel” out of the gospel of Christ, through the so-called “spoken Word”.

## **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “Abraham was the first Hebrew or Jew, that’s because God became his Father. When God became Abraham’s Father He then as a parent took care of all Abraham’s needs. Are you listening to me now as a parent, as a father? A father has responsibilities. I was sharing on Thursday evening at the Cresta Lodge Ningie gathering for executives, and the CEO of the Cresta group was addressing the Cresta ‘higher’ management. You know the CEO is from South Africa and he was saying that we can’t give you guys increments; things are tough. Then he shared a story: He said he was one of 20 children; his father had 3 wives he said, even if they were poor they were very, very happy, he said. In the same village where they grew up there was a man who had two wives and he had like eight children he said, but this man came every weekend home to visit the family; he would come with 5kg ‘magwera’ and a

piece of meat for him; and the children would have to eat what the 'goggas' have made from the 'Chigago', but the point here is that he was eating 'magwere', with a nice piece of brisket and his children were watching: That's gentiles. In the kingdom of God what the father eats the children also eats; so, if God is 'eating' something, now, you are entitle to eat what God is 'eating'. God doesn't come into this service with 5kg 'magwera' and 'eat', and you watch him 'eating'; that's not the way the kingdom works. The gentiles function fatherless, but when you become a covenant child and you enter into the kingdom of God, what God 'eats' you eat; what God is 'wearing' right now you're wearing."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher teaches that God became Abraham's Father, thereby starting Israel, and He has taken care of all his needs.
2. He discloses how a CEO could not offer his employees an increase that year.
3. He repeats the story of the CEO's childhood where he was raised as one of 20 children.
4. He repeated a story of how the children ate poorly while their father ate well.
5. He teaches that God would never come to the service and "enjoy" the best while his children eat poorly.
6. The preacher says that when you enter the kingdom of God, He makes you a covenant child and ensures that you will live well.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher assumes that the concept "Jew" was automatically a child of God. People became children of God only through his grace and forgiveness. Abraham did not receive the blessings of God because of some kind of merit he deserved, but only because he believed God and trusted him. The approach of the sermon that Abraham as a special person was blessed by God is a fallacy.

2. He went on to apply the concept of a “heathen” father, as an example, *vis-à-vis* children of God. He maintains, subsequently, that a “heathen” father does not allow his children to eat the same food and wear the same suitable clothes the father wears. He applies this automatically to God and his children, without any scriptural exposition or exegesis from the Old- or New Testaments.
3. It sounds blasphemous of the preacher to compare the so-called meals of God to the food the Christian eats, as well as the alleged clothing of God, which is unsubstantiated, to the wearing of human clothes. The point he tries to make is that what God enjoys, his children also enjoy, as if they were literally, earthly and in a “human” way “heavenly” children of God; also, as if God was in some way like human beings, eating and wearing clothes. No! God cannot be anthropomorphic and humans cannot be divinized: This is sacrilegious and impious.
4. The preacher claims that the covenant of God ensures a good and rich life. This is a denial of the gospel if it is assumed that the covenant automatically ensures wealth, for example. The blessings of God towards his children are out of pure grace alone and not a kind of mechanical blessing from God, as if the covenant is something in itself providing blessings. The same applies to claiming the “Word” as an oracle to be blessed – this is moralism and not true faith.

## **ABUNDANCE**

From the sermon: “Say, ‘I am prosperous’, say that again, prosperity is the absence of famine, say, ‘prosperity is the absence’, it is also as we said earlier, the presence of abundance. In the beginning God created the WHAT, the heaven and the earth; so, let’s look at heaven; heaven was not created with no houses, with no furnishings. The



man has got a driveway that is made of gold, so, if it's true there, then it's true here; so, you need a driveway...

God didn't create one of each; so, it's a Friesland of cattle, he didn't make one Friesland, he didn't make one Braman, he didn't make one Harrow, fit one Jersey with one long horn; he never made one buffalo, one lion within the millions of species of creation he created, but abundance within them; so, he didn't make one peach tree, one mango tree; he made an abundance. So, if it's true here then it's true there, so if He made an abundance of species in that species are abundance, then it has to be true here.

The next thing is the law of abundance in diversity, and abundance in the law of harvest; say, 'the law of harvest', say it again, 'the law of harvest'. What is a seed? In its next generation it is multiplied so many times more when you plant one. Seed according to the law of harvest; a harvest then becomes the abundance. It is impossible for us as individuals to carry a harvest. You can have a bag of tomato seed or a lot of seeds in your hands when you put those into the ground, and you get a harvest, no matter how much 'weights you do', you will never be able to hold that harvest by yourself as it's the law of abundance. If you put down a tree from a mango seed, what comes out from the ground you'll never be able to carry. You can't carry it as it is the law of abundance. So, in the law of harvest, the first seed produces generationally."

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher incites the church to say they are prosperous, again and again.
2. He claims that prosperity is the absence of famine.
3. He maintains that prosperity is the presence of abundance. What is in heaven in gold, should also be here in gold, for example, a driveway.

4. He says that when God created earth he did not create one thing as a singularity. When God created the earth he made an abundance of species in variety.
5. He announces that the “law of a harvest” is when small seeds are sown, a great harvest is reaped.
6. The preacher claims that the law of abundance and a harvest allows for the first seed to produce generationally.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher does something astonishing when he provokes the congregation to claim again and again that they are prosperous, as if the secret lies in the claiming of a kind of law which automatically will make them rich: The basis of this reasoning is the non-sensible “golden” driveway provided by God because the streets of heaven are supposedly made of gold.
2. He also confuses the blessings of the Lord with abundance of riches, as “prosperity is the presence of abundance”, and as if God’s blessings are automatically wealth in abundance. This is a confusion of the gospel with a human claim of prosperity by the preacher.
3. The comprehensive point he made about singularity and abundance of species in creation is a false application of the so-called law of abundance regarding the lives of Christians. God does not proliferate wealth in the lives of the believers automatically according to a “law of abundance” when they “claim” abundance. If God blesses the believers it is because of Christ and his merits out of grace and not because of some kind of law, for example, the so-called “law of abundance” in nature. God blesses us in Christ alone, not through a “law”, but through the Holy Spirit, and not through “naming” it, but through his grace alone.

## **PREACHER I**

### **SERMON TITLE: THERE ARE NO VICTORIES AT BARGAIN PRICES**

**“The time has come church, where our money has become so cheap. If it wasn’t for all of you, we wouldn’t have what you see here today. We would not have this board up here. (The preacher points to fundraising board indicating the amounts raised for the new church building and a fundraising target and milestones). You see, if the man of God had the commitment of all of you, we wouldn’t have this board. We would have one man and one woman come up and say to the man of God: ‘You know what? Don’t put that board up there. Don’t put it up, because I am going to be the channel of distribution.’ Amen!**

**Prayer: We thank you, oh Lord, and we honour your plan for our lives. We don’t know, oh God, where the money is going to come from, for your plans are higher than ours. We don’t know, oh God, our thoughts are so small and so limited, but your thoughts are greater than ours and, therefore, Lord, we just submit to your will for our lives in the mighty name of Jesus. I pray for every leader that is present, oh God, that is present, oh God. Father, you said that if they don’t support the man of God’s vision financially with the fruits of their labour, it shows no commitment and, therefore, oh God, I pray from today, let them have the power to create wealth so that they could support, oh Lord, the man of God in the mighty name of Jesus. Let an awesome anointing of prosperity come upon them and overtake them, oh Lord; in Jesus’ precious name. Amen and amen.”**

### **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher says that money has become cheap.**
- 2. He says that if everyone contributed to the church’s development, a fundraising board would not be up and no appeal for additional donations would be necessary.**
- 3. He tells the congregants that God would be the channel of distribution.**
- 4. He honours God for His plan in our lives in prayer.**

5. He states in his prayer that God's thoughts and plans are greater than ours.
6. He prays for the leadership of the church to support the vision of the senior pastor.
7. He prays for the leadership and congregation to gain the power to create wealth so they can support the vision of the senior pastor.
8. The preacher prays for the power to create wealth, for the awesome power of anointing of prosperity to come upon and overtake the church.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher is claiming boldly without any exposition or clarification that the congregation does not have to put up the board indicating income as God is to be the "channel of distribution" of the money. There is no justification for this.
2. He makes a general claim on the congregation to donate more money to the church, without any justification from the gospel whatsoever.
3. One has to be very careful of evaluating a person's prayer, but in this case we have to assess it against the gospel as standard and model: He assumes in his prayer that the money is to come from God for their use, which is not necessarily true.
4. He prays for every "leader" in the church and warns them in his prayer that "if they do not support the man of God's vision financially with the fruits of their labour, it shows no commitment". Here he claims "the vision of God", whatever that may be for him, without any exposition from the gospel. He makes a bold statement in his prayer on behalf of God, without any justification from the Bible, that there is no commitment from the leaders if they do not support his, (or "God's") vision financially. This type of prayer is an abusive way of prayer and not according to the gospel of Christ. It is only wishful thinking of the preacher in his prayer, being manipulative and very dangerous.

5. The pastor prays for an “anointing of prosperity”: “Let an awesome anointing of prosperity come upon them and overtake them.” This idea or concept is not in accordance with the gospel – the Bible does not follow this course of thinking as it is not Christ-centred: There is no anointing of whatever kind apart from Christ and apart from God’s will as revealed in the gospel. This is “creating” a type of gospel next to the gospel of Christ around the whole concept of “anointing” and “prosperity”, as well as abundant giving to the church.

### **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “Gehazi says to the master I can perceive that she has need of a son. And she knew that what God had given you, no man, no devil can take back. Do you know that? You better start believing it. You see if you got it on your own, then it can go on its own, but if God gave it to you and you can feel it slipping away, hey! You better not let go! You better let that faith step in and you better say: ‘Lord, this is what You have blessed me and my family with and it’s going to stay in this family. I am going to see the benefits of it, my children are going to see the benefits of it and I am not letting go, I am pressing into what God wants me to maintain and retain!’”

### **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says that what God has given, no one, human or devil, can take away, and that we have to believe it.
2. He says that we should let faith step in and assist us to declare that blessings given to us by God cannot be taken from us.
3. The preacher says God wants us to maintain and retain his blessings to see and let our children have the benefits of God’s blessings.

### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The preacher is applying this blessing of God, which Gehazi is speaking about, to the “prosperity blessing” of the Lord, as if that is the same. In fact, God has not promised any extremely abundant financial blessing to the believers in Christ.
2. He is claiming abundant wealth blessings to the believers without any exposition of the gospel regarding such blessings, thereby seemingly causing fleshly greed and avarice in believers as well as for their children; and worse, exhorting them to claim it from God.

## **ABUNDANCE**

From the sermon: “You know the Bible says in Psalm 66:12 that even though we went through water and fire, it is because You are taking us to a wealthy land. Scripture actually reads: ‘You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.’

And I ask of you, church, be careful that you don’t pay half price. Go all the way! Because you see, when you are in wealth, it is going to take an anointing for you to maintain it.

Some of you will even get to the place of billions. Amen! There are some secrets with which you can do that. By the time I am back the next time, God would have already blessed you with promotions, He would have blessed you with jobs, with business ideas... You don’t even have to worry, church to go to the bank even. They will be coming over to you.”

## **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher says that the scriptures tell us that even though we went through water and fire, where others “ride over our heads”, God is taking us to a wealthy land or a place of financial abundance.

2. He says we should not pay half price by not suffering, but go all the way in our giving towards the kingdom.
3. He says that our giving will be “anointed”; so, we can maintain our blessings.
4. He declares that many will be positioned to become “billionaires”.
5. He declares that the next time we meet the church would be blessed with promotions, jobs and business ideas.
6. The preacher tells the church not to worry as blessings will be given to them: They do not even need “to go to the bank” as it would “come over” to them.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. According to Ps. 66 Israel actually went through trials and tribulations in exile and were in a kind of jail in exile, with suffering and they were downtrodden. In verse 12 God has delivered them and brought them back to Judea, the land of promise. The Hebrew word which the preacher translated with “abundance” actually means properly “abundant drink”. It only occurs also in Ps 23, stating my cup is “running over”. The idea was that they were brought into a land where there was plenty of water, rivers, springs and streams, producing fertility and abundance – a well-watered place.
2. To use this historical message of Israel and apply it as a rigid permanent claim that God would be making some of the congregation members “billionaires” is simply ridiculous. “Next time” there would “promotions”, new “jobs”, business ideas” and “anointing to maintain the blessings”; the bank would even “come to them”, indicating dishing out money, billions of Rand. There is no gospel justification for this. If it were not so serious one could perhaps even say it is irrational, bizarre and borders on the absurd. What respect can this type of preachers expect to have from congregations?

#### **PREACHER J**

## **SERMON TITLE: DOMINION**

### **CLAIM**

**“The Word of God is powerful; listen, God dominates time, your age does not matter to God, God lives in the fullness of time, as matter of fact, time was only given to men as a resource, time was given to Adam to keep order, time was never meant to control you... the Word of God said, God restores if you have lost time, He gives back the years...How many of you know that God will give you the acceleration that outruns the chariots that were ahead of you? If you were last, God will make you first in the blinking of an eye. You see, God lives in the fullness of time and God is not limited or governed by the time you keep – a dimension of time.**

**God created you to rule, God created you to dominate every circumstance, to dominate all the works of God’s hands, to dominate all of God’s creation. We were design to dominate the works of God’s hands... Stop calling yourself ‘poor old me’, you will stop looking at yourself and feel sorry for yourself, you have got to pick yourself up and confess exactly who you are; and the way we know our identity is when we look into the mirror of God’s Word. God’s Word tells you who you are.**

**As a young person you went to the ATM and it said INSUFFICIENT FUNDS, I want to tell you, that even the bank, got it wrong. Because if that bank knew who you were, that bank would want to look for you and issue you with a card and everything else if they knew your true value; if that bank knew your net worth, if they understood your net worth in the Kingdom of Almighty God that bank would be looking at a future owner, a future director, your children and the works of your hands and your seed will own the industry of the banks because that is our portion, because God said, rule in the midst of your enemies.”**

### **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher says that the Word of God is powerful and that God dominates**



time; God lives in the fullness of time.

2. He says that God gave time to humnaity as a resource and for Adam to keep order, and time was not created to control you.
3. He teaches that the Word of God says that God can restore those who have lost time.
4. He says that God can accelerate us beyond those who were ahead of us; God can make you first in the blink of an eye. God lives in the fullness of time and is not governed by time.
5. He says that God has created us to rule and dominate in every circumstance.
6. He tells us to stop feeling sorry for ourselves and to confess exactly who we are, our identity as reflected in the mirror of God's word. God's Word tells us who we are.
7. He says that the bank got our net worth wrong: If the bank could see our true worth in the kingdom of God, it would see future directors and future business owners.
8. The preacher says that our children will own the industry because it is our portion.

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

1. The pastor's evaluation of time is a haphazard delineation of aspects of his speculation of time and vague thoughts about time in the Bible. The point he tries make is that if we lost time through bad events, for example, if the locusts have eaten our crops, God is able to restore that which we lost in due time.
2. The pastor makes the point that we were born with an identity to rule and dominate our situation. This identity is worth a lot as we are empowered to be rich and powerful, also as becoming managers and wealthy people. This emphasis is not the gospel's emphasis, as Christ taught us to be servants of

our brothers and sisters and “wash their feet”, and that we ought to love our neighbours – by doing this is not to feel sorry for ourselves, but to be praised by Christ. This is a different spirit from “controlling and commanding”.

## **CLAIM**

From the sermon: “God is going to elevate you, God is going to promote you ‘He gives me tongue of the learned’ that I might speak a word in season to him who is worthy. So, what did I do, I started confession the Word; well Lord you’ve given me the tongue of the learned that I might speak it in season; as I confess the Word it has been planted in the soil of my heart. So one day I got called to this boardroom: My first thought was, I’m in trouble. I sat down, and then, this is what the Word spoke, I am going to have the tongue of the learned and I started to speak words I’ve never spoke, and I started to speak concepts I never knew existed; I remembered the share price, the top 40, how they were performing, and I have never studied all that stuff; I started to speak these words in season. Listen your breakthrough is not 5 years away, not 6 months away, your breakthrough is when you speak.

We are going to decree the blessing; it’s not just aimless words, the blessing is about to get to someone to change their story this year; people are not going to even recognize you when this blessing works in your life, you’re about to go to an ‘uP G rade’, God is about to uP G rade you. God is about to change your life, change your story, change your circumstances; turn the tide around. God is about to open up a new day, a bright day over you. ‘Father in the name of Jesus under the authority of the Holy Spirit, right now I decree and declare the blessing of the almighty God, the blessing that makes rich and adds no sorrows, the blessing that heals the sick, the blessing that sets the captives free. We decree it now in the name of Jesus, if you believed that you received it.’”

#### **AN ANALYSIS:**

- 1. The preacher claims that God is to promote us: He envisages from the Bible that God would provide us with a tongue of the learned.**
- 2. He says that God gives him the ability to speak a word in season, and God planted the word in his heart.**
- 3. He explains how he was called to a boardroom and he had the tongue of the learned, able to quote the share price and exhibit the company's performance.**
- 4. He claims that our "breakthrough", whatever it may, apparently great wealth, is not 5 years away, but when we speak it out.**
- 5. He claims that people will not recognise us if God's blessing works out in our lives; God is about to upgrade us, change our circumstances and turn our tide around for a bright new day. He prays not a normal prayer, but "decree and declare", "under the authority of the Holy Spirit", the blessing of God, who makes rich and heals the sick. He also "declares" in prayer God's blessing that makes rich. The preacher decrees that if we believe that, we would receive it.**

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. The preacher does not explain at all what he meant by "God is to promote us", presumably it means that God would support us in many ways, especially to enrich us. He also meant apparently a gift of knowledge when he "knew" a great deal of information about the company, normally unknown to him. He does not explain how this happens or what the background of these blessings in the scriptures is. It is, consequently, a random statement plucked out of the air without scriptural justification.**
- 2. He claims a word in season which God planted in his heart, without placing it in a context or justifying it according to the gospel. Again, it is a general human conviction, used in vague humanistic way towards convincing the congregation to trust God, especially for abundant wealth.**

3. He announces that the breakthrough for the Christians is immediately if they believed it. He does not say, however, what this breakthrough is, and one can just assume it is a great financial breakthrough for God to supply abundant riches to them. On what basis and with which justification? It seems only a vague emotional expectation to stimulate the congregation towards donation of large sums of money.
4. In a decree and a declaration, which he claims to be a prayer under the Holy Spirit, he promotes the blessing of God towards wealth and healing. To “assist” the congregation towards action he “decrees” also the faith of the congregation, that if they believe they would receive it. Where is this in the gospel?

## **ABUNDANCE**

“The blessing, the word ‘blessing’ comes from the Hebrew word *‘berakah’*, it means the empowerment to prosper, it means the enablement to prosper, it means the ingredient that you need to be successful with everything and anything that you do on this earth.

Nonstop-praying, ‘God make me rich’, is an unscriptural prayer; stop praying for money, you don’t pray for money, kings don’t pray for wealth, they issue a decree, they issue and they summons their armies to go and possess the kingdoms and territories. You need to start commanding your stuff through, the voice of authority that God gave you and you need to decree the blessing and watch your words now, don’t dilute the power of God with words of doubt and fear.”

## **AN ANALYSIS:**

1. The preacher teaches that the word blessing comes from the Hebrew word

***“berakah”*, indicating blessing, which means empowerment, and to prosper, enablement to prosper.**

- 2. He teaches that blessing is the ingredient needed to be successful in everything on earth.**
- 3. He claims that to pray for money and for God to make us rich is an unscriptural prayer; the congregation has to stop praying for money.**
- 4. He declares that kings do not pray for wealth, they issue a decree for armies to possess kingdoms and territories.**
- 5. With this example he tries to motivate the congregation to start commanding the blessing, using the authority that God provides us with.**
- 6. The preacher tells us to “decree” God’s blessings over ourselves, without doubt and fear.**

#### **AN EVALUATION:**

- 1. The original meaning of blessing, which the pastor explains is beautiful, to empower and to enable to prosper. This he merely applies to financial enrichment, however, whereas in the Bible in numerous places it covers the whole of life, although he mentions that it is needed in life in general.**
- 2. He makes a mockery of prayer, as it is supposedly not to ask, or request something from God, whereas the concept prayer in Greek means, to ask, to petition and to request. Christ, however, taught us to pray and ask for a numerous things: “Our Father...”, and then He guided us to request, for example, protection from the Evil one, and to provide us our daily bread.**
- 3. The preacher regards prayer exclusively in terms of a king’s authority, not to pray for wealth, but to “declare” it and “possess” it by “summoning” abundant riches. Although he dares to call it “unscriptural to pray for money”, this is, however, a shocking step to usurp the place of Christ, who has possession of**

all power and authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28). Although he warns that the Christians should do this “without doubt and fear”, the practice of this preaching is to be feared in the almighty God’s presence. “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (Proverbs 9:10).

## **PROSPERITY PREACHING: A GENERAL CRITIQUE OF THE TEN SERMONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to generalise and take a critical view of the appraisals and considerations, the analysis and evaluation of these sermons in the previous chapter towards preparing a theology of the prosperity gospel in the following chapter.

### **4.3 THE QUALITY OF THE LANGUAGE, EXPOSITION AND APPROACH OF THE SERMONS**

- The quality of the language of the sermons was of a very low standard. This is perhaps to be justified to a degree as in most cases English is acquired and it is not the preachers’ natural language. Be as it may, it is vital for the successful deliverance of sermons to acquire the necessary language skills for these preachers to be able to deliver proper sermons.
- The quality and efficacy of the conceptualisation of the contents of the sermons was to a great extent totally inadequate: It may even be regarded as an intellectual offense of numerous intelligent and discerning members in the congregations. It is as if the preachers did not have a proper grip on the contents of the sermons; consequently they waffle, dither and waver considerably. Examples are not used in this chapter, as the excerpts of the sermons are available in the previous chapter. Perhaps one of the main reasons for this inadequacy of the standard was insufficient and scanty preparation. Another reason may even be more serious, namely, a lack of

appropriate and proper education and study of theology and exegesis, a proper preparation of sermons, and training in the skills of preaching proficiently as well as language acquisition.

- The consequences of the previous aspects of the lack of standards were that insipid examples were used as illustrations, wrong arguments to endeavour to prove convictions, generalised assumptions to apply the sermons and a lack of a proper grip on the contents of the sermons. The outcome of these deficiencies was poor communication with the audiences, as only insignificant communication skills were displayed.
- The approach of the sermons created the impression of a careless and slapdash, and even a haphazard, a “hit-or-miss”, attitude. The sermons were not well-researched, with little worthwhile contents and it created the impression that the topic of the sermons, namely, abundant financial prosperity for all Christians, *was rated so significantly that it did not matter how that was explained, researched, elucidated, clarified and conceptualised, and in what standard of language the sermons were presented.*

#### **4.3.1 THE LACK OF A CHRIST-CENTRED PREACHING AND LIVING AS THE MAIN PROBLEM**

- Christianity, the gospel, preaching and witnessing, and the church, as well as the comprehensive blessings of God, including material blessings, are centred in Christ, and his kingdom, who was crucified for our sins and resurrected as Saviour and Liberator; and that we can only encounter Christ through the Holy Spirit. If this approach were not followed, also in “prosperity preaching”, there would be no authentic gospel of Christ, salvation or blessings of God.
- These sermons did not have this gospel as point of departure or as a centre, but elaborated the messages from a variety of positions, mainly from the “covenant of God” of the Old Testament and in general, or from theoretical

anthropological machinations and maneuvers, selfish desires based on “sowing and reaping”, “anointing” through the preachers, or from “gifted” people, and examples of scriptural figures, especially Abraham. This was done, however, mostly out of context and without suitable exegesis and exposition.

- Another point of departure of these sermons was *the experiences* of preachers and dedicated believers who became extremely rich, justifying it solely with the above approaches of vague references to Old Testament figures, a “covenant”, or “sowing and reaping” without the gospel of Christ as the central foundation or contents of the blessings. These examples of becoming extremely wealthy do not take in account the many contextual factors through which these rich people obtained their wealth:

The collection of a Sunday service with a 1 000 congregants alone would yield R100 000,00 if the average donation is R100,00 each; or R50 000,00 if the donation is R50,00 each. This is apart from the tithes and donations of members, which would be at least approximately R500 per family per month and would yield with 500 members another R250,000 per month – This total would be *approximately R350 000 per month* in a reasonable small congregation of 500 members. This calculation is actually very conservative, and one can imagine what the income could be if there were 2 000 or more dedicated members.

- If there were no proper accountability and responsibility with meticulous bookkeeping and financial control one could imagine that a pastor or some leaders could become extremely rich in a short time in such a congregation, claiming “the blessings of the Lord”.
- The gospel is very clear, however, that labourers are worth their income and we do not deny that in the least. Of course there are many expenses regarding the buildings and the running of congregations, but here we are talking about surplus or excess funds – what happens to those? This delineation is not



about normal and reasonable income for work done, or normal running expenses, however, but about excessive wealth for an individual or a few leaders. Some ministers in large congregations, especially in Nigeria and the USA, own vast properties, a jet airplane, or even two, and a few extremely expensive cars, claiming the blessings of God on them as a result of “prosperity beliefs”. These wealthy ministers and “blessed people” usually disclose the vast amounts that they donate “to the work of the Lord”, but one very seldom, if at all, hears how they obtained these vast amounts of money practically.

- Another issue, mentioned by some preachers, is the involvement of pastors in business. Again, with pastors being involved in business or business deals, the context has to be taken into account: Being a successful pastor, his/her standing in the eyes of society is greatly enhanced, whether professional and astute business knowledge or approach is followed, or not. A successful pastor might earn a great deal of wealth through business, but it may not necessarily be as a result of a specific blessing of the Lord, but about “special favours” to him/her. The context of the congregation being involved in this part of the life of the pastor is also extremely important as he/she is a vital and crucial part of the heart of the congregation – this vital aspect is usually not taken into account as it becomes “a one-man/woman business show”, without any involvement of the congregation. Where is at least the moral accountability and responsibility of pastors in such a case? How can anybody claim “special blessings” from the Lord, because of “his/her covenant relationship”, the sowing and reaping principal”, etc., if other important factors mostly determine the wealth received?
- More research has to be done why Paul was not dependent for his livelihood needs on the support of congregations and Christian friends, and he did not

ask anybody gifts according to his “wants and desires”; he was a tentmaker.

As well as the reason why Jesus seemed to be “poor”, assisted by his friends and disciples.

#### **4.3.2 A MISUNDERSTANDING OF REVELATION HISTORY**

Many Christians believe that the Bible is the eternal Word of the eternal God without error, where every word was inspired by the Holy Spirit and written down by his servants once and for all. What we read in the Bible, however, is not “...an organised body of propositions, but a transformative process over long periods of time” (Nürnberg, 2004:2). There were numerous developments in concepts, also of God, the history of Israel and the prophecies, culminating in the Christ-event, which has become the final norm for the Word of God: “In the past God spoke...many times and in many ways...but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son. He... (Jesus) is the exact likeness of God’s own being. Christ opened this fresh new living way, which He initiated and dedicated and opened for us... (Hebr.1:1-3 (Good News Bible, 10:20 (Amplified). The Old Testament as a “rude outline foreshadowed” Christ and the good things to come; consequently, the Old Testament has to be read and interpreted in the light of Christ and the New Testament.

The impression one gets when reading these sermons is that the pastors are simply taking any text anywhere in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, and preach it as the final Word of God, regardless of the revelation of God in Christ, and proclaim that to be true in every aspect in the lives of the followers of Christ, renewed by Him – this is not preaching the Word of God. Rather, “We begin with...the Word of God...the living address...through a living community of believers...The Word of God is an

encounter with God which engages you, *not a monument you can look at and leave behind like a tourist*’ ((Nürnberg, ibid., emphasis added).

#### **4.3.3 AN OBSESSION WITH FINANCIAL PROSPERITY AS GOD’S BLESSING**

The churches, also the charismatics and the Pentecostals have always been known for a commitment to Jesus Christ’s gospel, but here the “good news” has been redefined: The preaching of uplifting the grace of God in salvation and holy living has been replaced by a newly conceived “gospel”, focusing on successful living, emphasising wealth. This obsession with wealth for all Christians means a switch from God’s providence in a Christian’s life to anthropocentric prosperity and accumulation of wealth.

The new trend is that the prosperity gospel claims that it is God’s will for every believer to be prosperous; the implication is that a “poor” believer is outside of God’s will for his/her life, transforming the will of God for Christians. This radical change places an immense load of guilt on Christians who try to be obedient to the true gospel, but who remain financially disadvantaged.

#### **4.3.4 THE VIRTUAL ABSENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE SERMONS**

There is virtually a total absence of the preaching of the work of the Holy Spirit in these sermons regarding the “wealth blessings” of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is actually the initiator of the gospel as Paul said that nobody can proclaim Christ as Lord, except through the Holy Spirit. This indicates that the prosperity teaching in these sermons, as examples, is missing the mark of the gospel of Christ completely. It rather places emphasis on “believe”, “obedience” and “claiming” the wealth promises of God for the believers’ lives. The promises are mainly the old covenant’s

promises. The pastors do not follow the first steps of interpretation in their “Christian” preaching, namely to explain the text in its context and its historical situation, but also mainly not a preaching of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

A solid historical and contextual proclamation of the gospel of Christ is that God loves us unconditionally, that Christ forgives our sins freely and that the Holy Spirit enlivens us and applies the complete gospel in all its fullness in our lives. Without the Spirit there is no blessing of God. *It is not acceptable to reason that the rest of the sermon outside the prosperity application is a different story: Every aspect of the sermon has to be Spirit-filled and Christ-centred as an interpretation of God’s Word.*

Financial blessings and the prosperity gospel of abundant wealth as the topic of the sermons analysed will be dealt with in the following chapter under the topic of a *theology* of the prosperity gospel and an assessment thereof.

## CHAPTER 5

### A THEOLOGY OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND AN ASSESSMENT

#### INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF THEOLOGY

The researched ten sermons were used as a basis to construct a theology of the Prosperity Gospel and to appraise this approach. A very brief history of the concept of theology is provided to insert this approach in a theological framework before an evaluation is provided.

According to the analysed tenets of the Prosperity Gospel in these ten sermons it became clear that the P G is not confined to a denomination or a tradition, but that it is a multi-facetted movement or a group belief system that had infiltrated a fair deal of modern-day Christianity, influencing primarily the charismatic movement, but also non-charismatic churches as well. It is also used as a draw card to get people to the churches as a kind of mission of the churches and to obtain money, also from the poor, with the promises of vast enrichment. This is a misdirected missionary approach as will be delineated later on.

The translation of *theologia*, theology, which is derived from the Greek, *Theos*, God, and *logia*, sayings, utterances or messages, discourse, accounts and reasoning, has developed throughout history. It started with the apostle of John, who is called “John the *theologos*”, a slightly different connotation than theologian, meaning a person delivering a message, the words of God. Thus, originally it was not a rational discourse, depending on reason, which in modernism became rationalism, the ultimate logical truth, but a concept of a message of God’s gospel, of His Kingdom and salvation.

Consequently, it was simply a devout and Holy Spirit-inspired reasoning or discussion concerning God and his kingdom message of salvation. This was the approach of the Latin theologians, for example, Tertullian and Augustine, and the Patristic Greek Christians. During theology's history it deviated from this original meaning continuously: Some Medieval Greek and Latin thinkers of *theologia* mention it in the sense of an account or notation of "the ways of God" or simply, His Words. Scholastic Latin sources denoted the rational study of the doctrine of Christianity and its theological tradition in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Out of this appeared theology as an academic discipline involving the rational study of Christian teaching in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, including a rational study of the nature of God according to Boethius and the Greek patristic fathers, called "theology proper" (cf. Theology, in Wikipedia, Internet).

Theology claimed a prominent place in the modern university as the queen of the sciences. This was challenged, however, by the Enlightenment and brought the independence and prestige of other independent subjects to the fore.

## 5.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century various different approaches have emerged in the West to establish theology as an academic discipline. Theology's place was determined by its methods, either as theoretical and "scientific", or a pre-commitment of faith was required; sometimes such a commitment was seen in conflict with "academic freedom" (cf. Frei, H W, 1992 & Howard, T A, 2006). Seminaries and Bible colleges have continued this alliance between the academic study of theology and training for Christian ministry. This development maintained theology as an academic discipline in its own right, with a pre-determined commitment of faith in Christ as required by churches, or as an academic and "scientific" discipline.

## **5.2 A DELINEATION OF A CIRCUMSCRIBED THEOLOGY OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN THE SERMONS**

In these sermons there is no systematic delineation of their prosperity messages or a Christ-centred theology and, consequently, a restricted theology is constructed out of their proclamations:

- **GOD'S WILL**

The pastors basically claimed that God wants all believers to be materially prosperous – if believers are poor they are outside the will of God. Through faith in, and obedience to, God's "principles", the believers have the power to gain amazing wealth. If the promised blessing is not received, patience and a refusal to doubt or to speak a "negative confession" will eventually bring about prosperity: Any believer who exercises sufficient faith can be exceedingly wealthy.

- **FAITH**

Faith is considered to be a "force" that compels God to act according to His promises, especially in the Old Testament and specifically regarding Abraham and God's covenant. Faith is basically understood and controlled by the words we speak. Thus, we have to speak only "positive" words with regard to God's overflowing wealth blessings.

- **KNOWING, OBEYING AND "SEEDING"**

Achieving prosperity, according to prosperity preachers, involves knowing, obeying, and believing:

The believers have to *know* and have to be convinced that it is God's will for them to prosper.

*Obeying* God is necessary for prosperity: If the believers do not obey the "laws" of God that produce prosperity, they will not be able to appropriate them. Obedience is the key to prosperity.

*Seeding* has to be exercised: Faith amounts to claiming authority over the financial resources which are already guaranteed by God if there is abundant donations, called "seed money": Believers have to make up their minds that they wish to live in divine prosperity and abundance and then put their action where their mouths are by abundant "seeds", donations. The Devil cannot stop the transfer of God's financial blessings as the believers have exercised their faith in the covenant that they have with God on the basis of "seeding".

#### - ENORMOUS ABUNDANCE PROMISED

Prospects of wealth can be astonishing, for example, even a hundred-fold as a reaction to "seed money". Of, course, the hundred-fold return on seed money is not automatic. Believers have to "believe-it-in". The "strength of faith" has to be continuously exerted, and if the intensity of faith relaxes, the return will stop pouring in. *Faith is the means* of accumulating the amount "owed" from the hundred-fold return.

### 5.3 AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

A primary imperative to interpretation is to interpret biblical verses in their context.

- One basic argument of the prosperity theology is the Abrahamic covenant which is supposed to promise contemporary believers wealth, even if they live in the New Covenant. God's promise to Abraham involved a promise to his descendants of land and blessing. Over 400 years later, the Law of Moses,



given to the nation of Israel, set forth blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. These blessings certainly included material blessings. These promises and warnings were given in a specific time to a specific nation, and in specific circumstances, however, and do not apply to the church today. Galatians 3:14 states that the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles, yet goes on to state that it came “so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”. Believers in Christ receive a blessing of infinitely greater value than material blessings. They receive the Spirit of God. Nothing in this verse teaches that any material blessings promised to Abraham and the people of Israel have been transferred to the believers in Christ.

- Concerning Mark 10:29-31, again we have to take the context into account: “Jesus replied, ‘No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.’” This verse does promise a hundred-fold return for things sacrificed for Jesus and the gospel, and the promise is to be realised in “this present age”; however, it is a violation of the sense of the verse and its context to say that God will give back a hundred fold for every gift given for the gospel.

The passage seem to apply primarily, if not exclusively, to those who have left their careers and embraced a life of deprivation, hardship and adversity in preaching the gospel full time in difficult circumstances as the apostles had done in their extremely difficult environments. Jesus actually warned them that they would be persecuted as He was mistreated. The passage also indicates that the hundred-fold return may not be in the same form as what was given up; neither is it clear that the apostles would actually possess these hundred

fold returns, for example, no person can have a hundred mothers or brothers or sisters. Clearly, Jesus is talking about relationships with other disciples in the kingdom that would become like mothers or brothers or sisters. Similarly, the “homes” do not mean that they would possess 100 homes for every one they gave up. Most likely the idea was that there would be hundreds of people who would share their homes with them, or the produce of their fields were available if they needed them. *Jesus was assuring the apostles that their sacrifices for Him and for the gospel would not go unrewarded and assuring them that their future was secure, even in this life.* Yet, the fulfilment of the promise seems to envision the care and generosity of other disciples in the kingdom of God, rather than the acquisition of great personal wealth.

We have to ask, “How were these verses fulfilled in the lives of the apostles?” From what we know of their lives, none of them ever actually possessed a hundred homes or fields. Yet, they did have hundreds of people who sold property and laid the proceeds at their feet according to Acts, but they did not keep this money. Instead, they distributed it to those who had needs; and they certainly had hundreds of people who would have let them use, or even given them homes or fields if they needed them. *Yet, there is no indication that any of the apostles ever pursued or achieved great personal wealth. The testimony of the Bible and of early church history indicates just the opposite.*

We have to interpret every single case in its context, apart from the facts that the Old Testament was fulfilled in the New Testament with a complete Christ-centred meaning as was indicated earlier on in the thesis. A few examples are used to make the point:

- The context of Joshua 1:8 shows that God is promising Joshua “prosperity and success in *military* victory”, not financial success. It specifically relates to the conquest of the Promised Land by Israel as the outworking of the land promises given in God’s covenant to Abraham.
  
- The same is true in 2 Chronicles 20:20. Jehoshaphat’s exhortation to have faith in God’s prophets and to be successful relate to military victory, not financial prosperity.
  
- Nehemiah’s response to his enemies that the God of heaven would give them success was referring to success in rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall, not financial success. In fact, the wall was rebuilt in the midst of a famine (Nehemiah 5:3).
  
- The promise of prospering in Psalm 1 uses the same word used in Joshua 1:8: The word does not necessarily carry the connotation of financial prosperity. It is most often used in a more general way to refer to success in whatever endeavour is undertaken. It is striking that even a righteous person bears fruit “in season”. *Continuous success and prosperity is not promised.* In addition, the promise envisions that the prospering person is following the will of God, which he ascertains and responds to as a result of meditating on God’s Words. The Psalm does not promise success and prosperity in whatever endeavour a person may undertake, whether or not the undertaking is in the will of God. Rather the Psalm promises success to those who meditate on God’s Words, following His guidance, and undertaking endeavours that are according to His will. *Nothing in the Psalm indicates that it is God’s will for every righteous person to be continuously financially prosperous.*

- Psalm 5:27 uses a different Hebrew word for “prosperity,” the word “*shalom*”. The word brings the idea of completeness, and is most often translated as wholesome “peace”. Here it means “welfare” (RSV), or well-being (NIV) and it is not specifically referring to financial prosperity. *God delights in our well-being, but there may be times when our well-being may actually be furthered more by financial want than by abundance. Sometimes God is more concerned with developing our character than granting us comfort through wealth.*
- John’s prayer in 2 John: 2 that Gaius might “prosper” in all respects was merely a prayer for health and safety. There is no promise or indication of God’s will for wealth in the verse. The Greek word literally indicates a “good journey” and does not necessarily convey the idea of financial prosperity, but rather has the idea that things would go well. Actually, the prayer seems to assume that Gaius was prospering spiritually and needed special prayer for his health. John was not as confident in Gaius’ good health physically as he was in his good health spiritually.

#### **5.4 BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF FAITHFUL BELIEVERS WHO LIVED IN POVERTY, BUT WITH THE BLESSING OF GOD**

- Numerous verses refute the prosperity teaching that financial prosperity will be obtained by every faithful believer. One of the most devastating is in Hebrews 11:36-40 (NIV): “Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Here are believers who were “destitute”. Obviously, they experienced great financial need and privation. Was it because they did not know about God’s promise of prosperity, or did not have the faith to claim it? No! *They were commended for their faith. So much so that they even made it into the Bible’s hall of faith in Hebrews 11.*

- A powerful refutation of the material aspect of the prosperity theology is to look at the life of the apostle Paul, who wrote the main interpretation of the New Testament, apart from the gospels and a few other books, and interpreted the gospel of Christ in a remarkable way for the church of the coming ages. In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul writes that he knew what it was like to be in need and what it was like to live in plenty. He learned that he could do everything through Christ, who gave him strength. Paul’s secret for getting along in “need” was not through exercising a special kind of “faith” that changed his circumstances, but through learning to be “content”. He knew that God would supply his bare necessities, yet he also had to learn to be content in privation and need. His contentment in need directly flies in the face of the “name it, claim it” prosperity philosophy of the gospel. *Paul himself was poor.* More than that, he *boasted* in being poor. In his defence of his apostleship in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, he gives a list of sacrifices he had made and difficulties he had endured. He gives the list to “commend” himself and his companions as “servants of God”. Paul’s list includes “poor” and “having nothing, yet possessing everything”. Clearly in this passage, Paul boasted in his poverty and saw it as establishing his credibility as a servant of God.

- In 2 Corinthians 12:27, Paul resorts to “boasting” in his effort to regain the Corinthians’ respect and to undermine the false apostles who tempted them to follow them. Then he gives them a list, detailing the incredible sacrifices he had made to bring the gospel to others. He states, “I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” Again we see that Paul was not only poor at times, but he boasted in his poverty. If Paul had believed or taught the “prosperity gospel,” he would have never boasted in his poverty, since the prosperity theology says that poverty is a result of a lack of knowledge, obedience, or faith. The prosperity theology in the thesis says that wealth is an indication of spirituality, yet Paul appeals exactly to the opposite. To him, poverty, at least poverty endured because of a choice to love others and to preach the gospel to them, was an indication of spirituality and gave him tremendous honoured rights over the false apostles who were trying to steal the Corinthians’ affections, as well as their money.
  
- An example from Paul’s life is found in 1 Corinthians 4: 8-16. Paul writes amongst other things, “To this very hour we (he and his companions), go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless and work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore *I urge you to imitate me* (emphasis added).
  
- Apparently, the Corinthians believers had come to believe a teaching similar to the “Prosperity Gospel”. Perhaps they were embarrassed by Paul’s sacrificial

life and sufferings. Evidently, like many modern Christians, they were impressed by supposed “apostles” who had power, prestige and prosperity. Paul’s stinging rebuke, as he compared their lives with his, is a clear indication of what he, and of course God, thought of their “prosperity theology”.

- Jesus Christ himself is the final, but most significant, example of a man of God who lived in poverty. Our Lord left the “riches of heaven”, became a human being, and embraced a life of deprivation and hardship. He was born into and grew up in a poor family. During his ministry, He told his disciples that He had nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). He had to perform a miracle in order to pay the two-drachma temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27). At his death, the Roman soldiers cast lots for His clothing, His only earthly possession (Luke 23:34). He left behind no estate, having asked John, the disciple, to care for his mother (John 19:26-27). No one would dare to suggest that God the Son was out of harmony with the will of God the Father or that He had lacked the faith to obtain wealth and material prosperity.

## **5.5 WHAT IS THE THEOLOGICAL STANDARD FOR FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS?**

- God has promised that if we would seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, He would meet our needs. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”. What are “these things”? They are the concerns expressed in the questions: “What shall we eat?” or “what shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” (Matthew 6:31). These are the basic needs of survival. God promises to meet our basic needs. We have no promises that we would become wealthy in this life.

- Paul sets forth the same standard for contentment in 1 Timothy 6:6-8: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that*” (emphasis added).

God may bless us at times so that we have plenty, as He did with Paul (Philippians 4:12); but the New Testament standard appears that we should be content as long as we have food and covering. *We should not reject prosperity that God may bring in the belief that money or possessions are inherently evil, for God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment* (1 Timothy 6:17; emphasis added). On the other hand, we must not accept the contemporary world’s view of money, to accumulate as much as possible for ourselves, and when people are rich they should heed God’s warnings about the seductive nature of wealth and prosperity. One way to achieve this is to do what Paul commands for those who are rich, namely, *those who have should give to those who do not have, so that there can be equality*, and “...to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life (1 Timothy 6:18-19).

## 5.6 A FALSE CONCEPT OF FAITH

As the beliefs of the theology of the Prosperity Gospel is crucially focused on its concept of “faith” and the attainment of extreme wealth through its “faith”, it is vital to understand this concept in theology and to appraise it:

- Prosperity theology according to the sermons regards faith as a sort of magic prescription: Words, for example, “formula,” “law,” “steps,” and “principles”



are used. These “laws” or “steps” were derived from Kenneth Hagen’s (in)famous, “say it, do it, receive it and tell it” (cf. D. Bovenmyer, 2010:4). Thus, faith becomes a magic force on its own, a power of conducive force, moving things, changing things. It is assumed that this faith will change the human body, change the heart and will change circumstances – this force of “faith” is released by words: It is maintained as truth that this kind of “faith”-filled words put the “law of the Spirit” of life into operation in our lives towards prosperity.

- Thoughts of doubt are *anathema* to the person seeking prosperity as it produces the power of “negative thinking”. In other words, just as positive thinking, “faith”, creates a positive reality; negative thinking, “doubt”, creates a negative reality.
- This approach makes faith a kind of absolute force in itself; it is regarded as a type of metaphysical force behind this world from where believers visualise prosperity and then from there they affirm and confess wealth towards transforming intangible images into tangible riches. This “faith” works also for unbelievers in the same way, as they are seen to co-operate with the “laws of “god”. This concept of “faith” as a force is totally unchristian and it is used blasphemously and wickedly.
- True Christian faith is trusting God to do *his* will, not the will of humans. The gospel faith is not confidence in the force of “faith” or the power of “words”, but it is confident reliance and trust in Christ, the Saviour and in God, the Father. Instead of being something that is exerted to move God into action, faith is a resting and relaxing in trust in him. The value of faith is not found in “the faith” itself, but in the worthiness of the Person that is being trusted, namely Christ. Christian faith cannot be manipulated by our thoughts and

words. Sometimes Christ can and does say, “no”, to our prayers; or He can answer them at a time or a way a great deal different from our expectations and prayers.

- The stories of the men and women listed in God’s hall of faith in Hebrews 11 show that none of these people viewed faith as a “force” to obtain what they wanted. Usually their faith was in response to an initiative from God: Abraham was called by God, Noah and Moses were commanded by God, Paul was entitled by God and even Christ was authorised by his Father.
- Nowhere in the scriptures do we find the concept of faith as a force that always produces results and, worse, “forces” God into action: Prayers are being answered only when they are in accord with God’s will (1 John 5:14-15) and are asked with pure motives (James 4:3). God has *not* given us a blank check to receive absolutely anything we believe in strongly enough.
- The “faith” concept of these prosperity preachers is a false concept of faith that leads to the acceptance of other theological aberrations:  
It tends *to reduce the sovereignty of God* as He then becomes “a being” that can be “manipulated” to give us anything we want if we exercise the force of faith long enough and sufficiently intense. Faith “forces” “god” into work according to our will. Consequently, “god” becomes the human beings’ servant, waiting to do their bidding—if they have enough magic “faith” it exalts the human being by providing exceptional powers.
- This “faith” tends to diminish our understanding of the person-hood of God and causes us *to view him as an impersonal force* – that is why “god” is then written with a small “g”, as it is an idol to be used, and not the living God. He

becomes virtually incapable of making independent decisions apart from the power of “faith” working upon him regarding prosperity. Prayer is not fellowship with God anymore and to ascertain what his will is – prayer is replaced by “faith” claims and demands on the basis of God’s so-called covenant. Prayer to God becomes a claim that He should live up to his scriptural promises. Here, prayer becomes a kind of mantra and intonation to initiate the force of “god”, and that, not in a personal relationship, but replacing a loving, caring Father.

- This concept of “faith” puts a tremendous burden upon the believers, to think only and speak “positive” thoughts and words, and never to think or say anything “negative”, as our thoughts and words determine what will happen in our lives. This concept of “faith” becomes magical and even superstitious, with our words becoming the incantation and invocation that supposedly controls reality.
- Ephesians 4:14-15 admonishes us to be solidly grounded in the truth of Christ and to be careful not to be blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. The prosperity movement threatens historic Christianity and the faith of the body of Christ in numerous ways:

It promises prosperity falsely to everybody, leading to disappointment, self-doubt and misgiving towards the real God and his promises in Christ.

It places an incredible burden upon Christians with financial problems: If people are poor, they are to feel guilty as they have only themselves to blame, because of a lack of “magic faith”.

It causes wealthy believers to look down upon those who are poor, as “out of the will of God” or lacking in “faith”.

It promises blessings now, that God has reserved for the next age.

It subverts the demands of the cross for self-denial.

It endorses worldly success as the standard of spirituality and of God’s blessing.

It exalts deceptively the abilities of human beings.

It tends to reduce God to be a means to an end, causing us to view him as a “force” rather than a person (cf. Bovenmyer 2010. His article has been consulted for this evaluation).

In 2 Timothy 4:3 Paul warned Timothy that the time would come when men would not put up with sound doctrine, but would “gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” - the promise of worldly gain. We must faithfully preach the true message of the cross - a message of self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of others and for the glory of God. Jesus said, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33; emphasis added).

To be able to evaluate the Prosperity Gospel it is necessary to set up a benchmark of the true gospel of Christ against which one can measure the aberrations from it. This is to be done in the following chapter.

**A PREREQUISITE FOR THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL: THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST CONVEYS ABUNDANCE, BUT NOT ACCUMULATION**

## **5.7 DETERMINING A BENCHMARK**

The quest of the thesis was the figure of speech or metaphor: “**MONEY RAINING FROM HEAVEN?**” The answer to this question was a resounding affirmative reply.

The gospel of Christ is the good news of God: God so loved the world that He wished to save humanity through Christ. This is the summary of the blessings of God, bestowed on the believers in Christ. The blessings “raining from heaven”, however, have two conditions:

When God has said to the liberated Israelites in the desert, “I am going to let bread rain from heaven for you” (Ex. 16:4), He provided “economically” for them with the manna on two conditions as a spiritual guide for them:

- God would supply in their needs, and want was eliminated, but they could not hoard and accumulate wealth. They could only receive enough for their needs by picking up the manna every day
- God eliminated surplus accumulation as the excess manna became bad and rotted the following day.

This “bread from heaven”, “money raining from heaven” reminded the believers that God guaranteed enough for his people, but did not create opportunities for the powerful, eloquent, rich and powerful authoritative people to exploit the weak and poor (cf. Schultz 2010:127).

The aim of the chapter was to construct a benchmark of the gospel of Christ regarding “prosperity” and to determine deviations. This was vital as it was difficult to distinguish between the abundance of blessings coming normally through the gospel and a defilement, desecration and abuse of the gospel towards self-seeking abundance, the accumulation of riches and simple, selfish greed, at the expense of others.

The gospel emphasised at least the following blessings through Christ:

- Jesus claimed that “He was” our health, wealth and happiness. He is the ultimate end and satisfaction for all our desires and longings. Jesus said: “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6), and, “I have come that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance” (John 10:10)
- The gospel presented God’s generosity as a gift in and of itself: It is an outpouring of the love of Christ. Disciples gave because they had already received the greatest treasure of all, Christ as Saviour and provider for their needs - they “did not give to get”, *do ut des* (“I give to receive”) as the unbelievers (cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-7)
- “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing” (Ps. 16:2)
- We received forgiveness for all our sins, past, present and future. The massive burden of guilt had been taken away from us. We received the peace of God, and, consequently, peace of mind – blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven (1 John 1:9)
- The power of sin is broken by Christ and we have received freedom from the tyranny of sin (Rom. 8:1, 2)
- As children of God He promised to supply in all our needs – we would never lack good things. He provides our daily needs. “...do not worry and be anxious...what shall we eat...drink...wear? For the Gentiles, heathen...crave and diligently seek all these things...But seek first of all his kingdom and his righteousness, and then *all these things will be given you...*” (Matt. 6:30-33)
- We are blessed as Christians to have received the Holy Spirit, our Guide, Teacher, Companion, and Comforter in times of stress, loneliness and despair.

Through him we discern what is right and wrong. He assures us of Christ's loving presence in our lives

- God blessed us with wonderful Christian fellowship, brothers and sisters in faith who surround us with tender loving care. We carry one another with our prayers
- Christ pronounced the beatitudes, from the word *beatitudo*, "blessedness", extreme divine happiness, inner peace and serenity on eight types of people following Him (Matt. 5:3-12):
- *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* – "poor in spirit" may mean our spiritual condition of poverty and the recognition of the need for Christ. The kingdom refers to people who acknowledge God as their ultimate King.

A PROMISE FOR US: Extremely happy are those who humbly recognise their need for Christ, for they will enter the Kingdom

- *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* "Mourners" may indicate those who mourn for their sins and repent from their sin. "Comforted" signifies freedom found in forgiveness and the joy of eternal salvation

A PROMISE FOR US: Extremely happy are those who mourn for their sins, for they shall receive forgiveness and eternal salvation

- *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."* The "meek" may be those who submit to Christ's authority, acknowledging him as Lord. "Inherit the earth" indicates according to Psalm 37:11, "...the meek in the end shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace"; and Rev. 21:7, the Christians will "inherit all things". Inheritance comes after our lives; "...all of those (the faith heroes), though they won divine approval by their faith, *did not receive the fulfillment of what was promised*. Because God

had us in mind and had something better and greater in view for us, so that they should not come to perfection apart from us” (Hebr. 11:39, 40).

**A PROMISE FOR US:** Extremely happy are those who submit to Christ as Lord, for they will be heirs to everything God possesses

- ***“Blessed are those who hungry and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*** This may refer to a great need and driving passion for what is right according to Christ’s righteousness. They will be satisfied and fulfilled by Him.

**A PROMISE FOR US:** Extremely happy are those who passionately long, desire and seek Christ’s righteousness, for He will satisfy them.

- ***“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*** “Mercy” may be undeserved favour for forgiveness and offering kindness and compassion towards others.

**A PROMISE TO US:** Extremely happy are those who display undeserved benevolence and forgiveness, for they will receive unmerited magnanimousness from Christ.

- ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*** “Pure” may denote a cleansing from within through Christ, an inner holiness that only God can see and detect. This enable us to “see”, communicate, with God. Without “holiness...no one will see God” (Hebr. 12:14).

**A PROMISE FOR US:** Extremely happy are those who have been purified and made holy from within by Christ, for they will communicate with God and experience his presence

- ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”*** “Peacemakers” are reconciled with God through Christ and have peace. They proclaim this peace of Christ in word and deed to others in all circumstances. They will be recognised as, and called, children of God.



**A PROMISE FOR US:** Extremely happy are those who have peace through Christ and promote this peace in word and deed, as they will be distinguished and described as children of God

- ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*** This may indicate that those who do not shy away from Christ’s righteous in deed and word, but rather endure persecution are recognised as part of the God’s kingdom.

**A PROMISE FOR US:** Extremely happy are those who maintain Christ’s justice despite persecution, as they will be acknowledged as part of God’s kingdom.

The yardstick of God’s spiritual and material means is that He bestows it especially through Jesus Christ to the believers, and that He is also longsuffering, tolerant and generous towards all people. “He makes his sun rise on the wicked and on the good, and makes the rain fall upon the upright and the wrongdoers” (Matt. 5; 45).

In addition, the question is that if God’s blessings come through the love of God displayed in Christ, and all these promises of blessings are there, how do we obtain these blessings. This is especially a theological issue of attaining the blessing and spiritual and material resources promised by God. How do we proclaim *the attaining of God’s promises* through theological means, preaching, witnessing, testifying, counselling, praying, etcetera?

## **5.8 THE CHRISTIAN MODE OF ATTAINING THE BLESSINGS OF GOD**

The gospel is clear that the *way of attaining God’s promises are just as important as the contents of the promises*. Although these promises are open-ended to some degree, it is clear that the way of obtaining them is also through the Holy Spirit and Christ. “For as many as are *the promises of God, they all find their Yes, their answer, in Him, that is Christ*. For this reason we also utter through him to the glory of God” (2

Cor. 1:20). *The Holy Spirit presents the gifts of God and blesses people.* “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit...” (Zech. 4:6).

The question remains, how do we obtain these promises of God for our practical lives, even if we accept the way of attaining them through the Spirit and Christ? An answer is that the way of obtaining the promises of God is through faith or trust in Him. “...the just shall live by faith and if he draws back and shrinks in fear, my soul has no delight or pleasure in him” (Hebr. 10:38). “Without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to Him. For whoever would come near to God must believe...that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him (Hebr. 11:6).

The problem with this interpretation is that *it is not clear exactly what faith or trust is and how it operates.* We know that “faith is the assurance of the things we hope for, being the proof of things we do not see and the conviction of their reality” (Hebr. 12:1), but does it operate automatically that if we believe in Christ that we would receive God’s blessings inevitably? Is something else necessary, or *is faith a law unto itself that we have to practise it as a regulation, a decree or a formula which would automatically work towards receiving God’s blessings, as some preachers of the Prosperity Gospel claim?*

The gospel teaches without exception that faith is always trust in the person and work of Christ *alone*. It is *only* His power and promises upon which we lean, not the power of our faith, or faith as a formula or law unto itself. “...the righteousness of God...comes by believing with personal trust and confident reliance on Jesus Christ, for all who believe. For there is no distinction (Rom. 3:22). It is only his power and promise upon which we lean, *not the power of our faith* (Romans 3:26-28, Ephesians 2:1-10). The theological emphasis is never on our faith, but on the promises of God, *on trust in Christ, and on our reliance on the Spirit.*

The gospel teaches that praying in Jesus' Name for blessings indicates praying for *things that are in according to his will and purpose*. "If we make requests which *accord with his will He listens to us*; and if we know that our requests are heard, we know also that *the things we ask for are ours*" (1 John 5:14).

It is important to realise that God's promises of His blessing does not exclude suffering and hardships. Jesus himself has suffered and called his disciples to take up the cross, forsake the world, and be prepared to suffer as He suffered (Matt 16:24-28; John 15:18-20). Moreover, the apostle writers told us that suffering of Christians is also a means by which He sanctified his people (2 Cor. 1:3-10; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 19; Hebr. 12:5-12; John 15:2).

## **5.9 A THEOLOGY OF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN RECENT TIMES AS A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

This is not the place and time for examining money or the economic situation in the society in-depth as a major theological category. An in-depth theological study of the nature and role of the monetary system in contemporary societies would go beyond the thesis. It is no secret, however, that something is decidedly and devastatingly wrong with globalised capitalism, where the alarming gap between the rich and poor, and also the extremely rich and the dire poor is growing continuously, with all the disastrous consequences, also in South Africa. *Wealth and poverty in the gospel's system of meaning, however, is the context in which the prosperity gospel is to be situated and evaluated. Also whether it is valid to use the lure of money to attract people to the church as a kind of missionary task. It is decidedly not the mission task of the church to lure poverty-stricken people to the church with the deceitful promises of wealth in abundance for everyone.*

The aim here, therefore, is to place the "prosperity gospel" in the framework of the economic situation of recent times and to propose a certain transformation of the

situation. In the light of the overall tenets of the gospel and according to the universal state and approach of the economy the “prosperity gospel” has to be placed in the context of the contemporary society, the rich and the poor, and the church as a whole:

*It is not only a question whether the “prosperity gospel” is right or wrong, but whether it would valid even to ask this question in view of the disastrous poverty in the world where two-thirds of the people are living under the poverty line – instead we have to ask what is God’s will regarding the magnitude of poverty and what is our responsibility to the poor and to structural change, where people are mostly kept poor by the rigged system of capitalism and the exploitation of political systems and the lack of proper training and opportunities.*

The danger in the churches is that there is a reduction of the gospel to enhance some kind of ideology of the gospel, making human convictions the ultimate norm in the church and not the authority of Christ and His Spirit: The way this is being done is by way of different ways or methods:

- The danger of the “prosperity gospel” is that the gospel as a whole, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, is redesigned to function as a *legitimation of vital interests of enrichment for some “believers”*. A corrupted version of the Christian faith would show what the true motives are that of wealth, power and glory: Wealth would then be justified in terms of the acknowledged “gospel” system of meaning: God supplied extreme wealth for the emphasising of “believing” as such.
- There is another danger in using the gospel as an ideology, where *ideology is the endeavour to make a human purpose or conviction the highest or absolute priority to be pursued. Consequently, everything, even your faith has to fit into*

*that overall persuasion or ideology, for example, if you exercise proper faith you have to be blessed by God with wealth.*

- This *reinterpretation* of the gospel's system of meaning also takes on another form of misconception, namely the *spiritualisation* of the gospel.

Spiritualisation is a deviation from the gospel of Christ: Spiritualising the gospel

is to protect the Christians from losing their spiritual interests, consequently, the "spiritual" message means only to be liberated from sin and condemnation, and *not* from so-called mere external structural injustice, and hardship in society and politics. The consequence of spiritualisation is that social justice is superseded by justification by faith, tearing the gospel of Christ apart, and making it powerless. The underlying motive is clear: It is a withdrawal from responsibility before God in the spheres of economics (wealth and poverty), social organisation and politics.

The spiritualisation of the gospel is also applied in other areas of life, which is not focused on here: Slaves had to remain slaves after being spiritually "saved", still being subject to their "masters"; the unity of the church was a so-called "spiritual unity", and not an institutional or physical unity; only so-called "spiritual ethics" mattered, not the structures of society and of the churches; freedom, equality and fraternity in the world was supposed to be humanistic and not really Christian.

- Another form of the reduction of the gospel is to declare the Christians' interests "safe": Not to share wealth with the poor is to declare the social, economic and political spheres *out of bounds for the gospel's system of meaning*. This would simply mean that economics, social organisation and politics were autonomous spheres of life, not under the kingship of Christ.

Gospel convictions are regarded as a person's private concern. This reduction of the gospel only deals with a person's relationship with God, and at best, with a person's attitude to the neighbours: The parable in the gospel of the rich man and Lazarus condemned the rich man as he relied on his wealth and did not care for the poor man, although he might have had "a good attitude" towards him – he allowed him to eat crumbs falling from his table.

- Another form of the reduction of the gospel is *to subdivide life into secular and religious spheres*. The secular areas are then governed by "the practical issues" and the spiritual areas are guided by the gospel: *This leads to individualistic and collective materialism*. The consequences are that in economics, politics and in society the "principle" of the survival of the fittest prevails – this is a contradiction of the cross, where Christ is seen to become weak and poor to conquer and to enrich people only on a spiritual level and not liberate them regarding earthly ties and bindings in politics and economics, for example. Jesus came to liberate the poor (Matt 4) and not to make this one of the priorities in the church is to deny the gospel and to allow another "divinity" to take over, towards enriching a few millionaires and billionaires.

We have to remember that the New Testament church had the Old Testament as its Bible – the background was the apocalyptic expectation of a complete renewal of society and the world by the coming of the kingdom of God on earth: the King of the kingdom was interested in social justice, also regarding wealth and poverty.

The consequences of the reduction of the gospel towards becoming an ideology are disastrous: Paul described in details the clash of the flesh and the Spirit in Romans 8. In this framework to live according to the flesh meant that *interests manipulate or*

*dominate convictions – the wealthy people's convictions and the unjust structures of society and the economics were controlled and determined by their interests, not by the Spirit of God. This is why Paul warned that "...those who crave to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many godless and hurtful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction and miserable perishing. For the love of money is a root of all evil; it is through this craving that some have been led astray and have wandered from the faith ..."* (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

#### **5.10 A THEOLOGY OF SOCIETY AND ECONOMICS ACCORDING TO THE STANDAND, "LIFE"**

Christ has come that we may have life, as He has given his life to save the life of others (John 10). The economy is a God-given stewardship of *life* (cf. The Social Statement, 1980:1). The economy is to be used in human life towards maintaining, enhancing and protecting life as a gift of God. This means that everything in the economy, the system, labour relations, income as a just *quid pro quo* equivalent reward for work, the quality of the life of the worker and his/her family, etc., is to be geared to the enhancement of the life of the workers, managers, labourers and owners. The economy is inseparable from the whole of human life, as well as from the justice as the enhancement of life. Life under God is not only individual life, but it is also meant to be life in community. "There is no humanity but co-humanity, for one cannot be human alone" (ibid: 2).

The theological yardstick of economic life for society is to propagate, nurture and extend human life and enhance its quality and to protect and use the world's resources wisely, and especially, "...to share equitably the product of that work to the benefit of all people...God calls the redeemed in Christ to be advocates and agents of justice for all" (ibid).

The problem with globalised capitalism as a comprehensive and dominant ideological economic system is that the whole practice of religion and also the gospel is compellingly redesigned to function as an ideological legitimization of vital interests according to the concerns of the economy. The history of capitalism shows that it is built on the “*achievement norm*” and individualism. This approach claims that the poor as individuals are poor on account of their “failure”, while the rich is rich because of their “achievements” and merits, also by way of “believing” in the Prosperity Gospel. Besides globalising capitalism there were other varieties of economic systems, not geared towards enhancing excessive wealth, for example, social democracy, African communalism and democratic socialism.

Another model of interpretation of the economic reality is the “*equality norm*”: The poor are poor because they are the victims of oppression and exploitation of the exploitative economic and political structures, while the rich are rich because of their undeserved privileges abusing their structural power to exploit the workers (cf. Nürnberger 1988:234).

One consequence of the above in the situation in S A is that the income gap between rich and poor is one of the highest in the world. More than 15 million blacks are living under the poverty line, going to bed “hungry” every night – that is one-third of the population; another third are more or less making a “decent” living, and the last 15 - 20% are more or less well off, with a small minority at the top being extremely rich, black and white, being millionaires and billionaires.

The real issue in the situation of appalling poverty and excessive wealth is that vital selfish interests have been allowed politically and economically to crowd out, overrule and manipulate convictions in practical decision-making privately and corporately to such an extent that the population and the churches do not realise their actual influential potential – compare strikes, boycotts, protest marches, mass



complaints and protest memoranda with supporting signatories. Political, religious and economical convictions have become largely irrelevant in the concrete issues of life. The political leaders simply take it for granted that they have been chosen to rule “according to their authority and insight”, which means protecting their own selfish interests ideologically.

The economic and big business charlatans, shield behind the “free-market system, ruled by the hand of God” where the dice is loaded against the poor in a rigged system. The churches on the main have accepted the modernistic division in life that economics and politics are independent and neutral in life under “God” and that they have to concentrate on the spiritual aspect of life and proclaim an individualistic ethic of fairness and honesty – the spiritualising of the gospel. The aftereffect is that we live in a society where naked selfish interests have taken over *en masse*.

Sometimes this triggers power struggles of revolt because of lack of service delivery regarding water provision, insufficient and a shortage of proper housing, unsafe living conditions, unhygienic health situations, lack of protection and proper health services, etc., etc. The meaningfulness of life and justice, however, do not win the day, but the one-sided random and arbitrary distribution of power between the groups and sections of society. The result in S A and other areas is that humanity lost its vital and unique gifts of self-determination and accountability, and became helpless victims of social, political, economic and psychological forces beyond its control (cf. Nürnberger 1988:267). Just consider 40 recent events of service delivery protest uprisings across the country, the unrest at Lonmin mine with the unnecessary and “deliberate” killing of 37 workers by the police and the wrongful charge of scores of workers with murder where they unjustifiably have to prove their innocence, the major upheaval in Syria, a type of civil war, where already 30 000 have been killed by the government forces, and recently the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria, where

the extremely rich and all-powerful presidents were overthrown after decades of dictatorial, exploitative and cruel rule.

The churches have to make a vital and life-saving attempt to rediscover, vitalise and bolster the power of Christian spiritual convictions as our survival is at stake – this is not an alarmist statement in view of the fact of approximately 57 murders per day in S A, to name just one aspect – again, the poor are the most vulnerable, being exposed to rape, drugs, trafficking of girls (up to a million per month in the world), trapped in hopelessness, etc.

The churches have to proclaim again Christ's message with clarity and spiritual conviction that they who wish to save their lives, gratify themselves and live according to their selfish enriching interests *will lose their lives*, but he/she who would lose their lives for Christ's sake would gain their lives. In addition, to proclaim *the rightful gospel of personal and structural renewal*: The kingdom of God has to come in personal lives *and* in politics, the economy and society – Christ taught us to pray, *Let Thy rule, Thy kingdom come on earth...*

In the context of wealth and poverty we have to consider the Prosperity Gospel theologically in the light of the historical revelation of God: The relationship with God is not based on an external set of rules, laws, regulations or norms valid for all situations and times, but on a personal relationship of mutual faithfulness between God and human beings, and also between human beings (cf. Ibid:301).

There were three historical variations in the biblical revelation history, each with a specific content. This was the development of the gospel of God, culminating in the self-sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah on the cross. That is why Christ and His gospel is the norm also for the scriptures and their interpretation as the final revelation was in Christ as the fulfillment of God's work. "In the past, God spoke...many times and in

many ways through the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us through his Son (Hebr. 1:1).

The three variations of the progressive transforming power of the biblical revelations were *“survival”*, *“justice”* and *“unconditional love and concern”* (cf. Ibid):

- *“Survival”* features prominently in the early stages of Israel’s history. God was unequivocally “on the side” of his elect nation, whether they deserved it or not. He liberated them from the tyranny and exploitation of Egypt, led them through the desert and provided for them, despite their disobedience, and empowered them to conquer a country – He defended their vital *survival interests* against anybody getting in the way. This, however, was the “imperfect”, developing “gospel” *en route* to the full and final revelation of the Messiah King, Jesus Christ, who would sacrifice his life for his enemies.

Wrongfully and disastrously this stage of the revelation history has been and still is transposed onto the competitive spirit of globalised capitalism as the survival of the fittest, with “god’s” help. The rich hoard and boast in faith in “god” for his chosen support. “L Blankfein, the CEO of Goldman Sachs” claimed this ideology: “...he made a remarkable bold claim. ‘We have a social purpose’. Blankfein claimed to be doing ‘God’s work’. His advisor, Brian Griffiths, was equally explicit: ‘The injunction of Jesus to love others as ourselves is an *endorsement of self-interest*’” (Schultz 2010:137; emphasis added).

Schultz rejected the “prosperity gospel” by name in the context of the poor as he claimed: “‘Those in despair are the most easily manipulated by demagogues, who promise a fantastic utopia, whether it’s a worker’s paradise,

*fraternite-egalite-liberte*, or the second coming of Jesus Christ.’ I have in mind particularly the ‘prosperity gospel’ which seeks to overcome economic struggle by reinterpreting apocalyptic texts to justify the most obscene transfers from the poor to the rich. But any ‘faith-based’ approach that preaches accommodation to consumerism is on the wrong track.” The Christians “...should be unafraid of confronting phony alternatives, prepared to puncture the despair that funds them” (ibid: 116; cf. Hedges 2007).

To use an ossified and absolutised transitional part of the history and background of the gospel, for example this period of “security”, as the eternal will of God for all human history and for all historical epochs is a complete misunderstanding of the gospel of Christ and God’s revelation – God revealed him historically in different ways, culminating in the revelation of Christ, as the gospel and good news of God for all.

- “Justice” announced the next stage, the coming of God’s justice for his people as based on equal opportunity. Nobody was allowed to pick up more bread (manna) in the desert than others (Ex. 16:15ff). The agricultural land was allocated by lot (Num. 26:55. Jos. 14:2, Ps. 16:6). If people lost their land as means of subsistence through economic mismanagement it had to be restored after a fixed time. The prophets lashed out against the accumulation of wealth by some at the expense of others. King Ahab who took the vineyard of Naboth by committing judicial murder had to pay with his own life (1 Kings 21-22; cf. Nürnberger 1988: Ibid:303).

*Justice overruled the “principle” of survival once it was the next stage in the revelation history.* Nobody could now claim anybody, as a worker, to be an economic resource in a “slave”-type relationship: What was claimed for one had to be granted to others. No discrimination against the weak and poor for the benefit of the powerful and the rich was allowed. God was now maintained

as the all-powerful true God, defending the powerless, the poor, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan. People failing this justice were taken to task even to the extreme measure of annihilation.

- The final step in the historic revelation was “unconditional love and care or concern”. This also issued in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ and His gospel, foreshadowed in the Old Testament. “Justice” guaranteed each group the right to its share of the economy. One group’s right was as important as another’s. Now, “love, care and concern” goes beyond that – it means willingness to share one’s right with a group who has forfeited its rights. Christ who was rich became poor, not for the sake of poverty, but to enrich those who were poor. He enriched us, not for the sake of being rich, but to enable us to become poor with Christ to enrich other poor people (cf. Ibid: 304).

Paul deliberately applied this gospel paradigm in 2 Cor. 8 to economic discrepancies, where the economic potent were expected to empower the economically impotent. The poor people were expected to move up on the economic ladder and then also support the other poor. This approach created equal dignity. Equal dignity is seriously required where misery contrasts with superabundance.

- “Care” overrides “justice”, just as “justice” overrides “survival”. The goal of survival is fulfilled in justice, and justice is fulfilled in unconditional love and care through the Spirit. The problem in a situation such as ours where care breaks down is that poor people have to fall back on justice for survival to claim what is rightfully theirs – usually by way of disastrous power struggles.

Apathy of Christians is mostly determined by the belief that Christian care cannot determine social or economic reality, as it presupposes that everybody has to be converted to Christ. This is not true – Christians are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. *Furthermore, this claim of responsibility for our neighbours is God's universal claim and valid for all people.*

Another common false assumption is that personal conversion also leads automatically to renewal of societal structures. Christian piety is sometimes a hindrance to structural change as many believe only in “spiritual” involvement. We have to focus deliberately on structural change as we remain sinners till our death, in spite of our conversion – our “holiness” does not automatically overflow into society. In addition, our new life is “in Christ” and not in the “flesh” – we have to apply Christ's gospel to structural change, as we are inclined to continue our group interests against the poor in society. After our conversion to Christ we also need “a conversion to the world” through the Holy Spirit (cf. Ibid:306).

In the context of this life-and-death struggle of the dire poor, exploited and dominated workers, with extremely poor living conditions with their families, sometimes lacking water for weeks, and 30% of the population unemployed, we have to consider the merits and misuses of the Prosperity Gospel: Exceedingly poor people are encouraged and convinced to donate as much as possible to “god and his work” and to believe “god” would supply in multiplication of riches to them. In the meantime in churches, especially in Nigeria and the U S A, but also in S A, prosperity preachers preach this compromised “gospel” to many poor people, while they themselves live in extreme luxury, sometimes owning a number of the most luxurious cars, a few

jets, and millionaire's properties in various parts of the world (cf. D B Mumford 2012:130).

The pure simple and glorious gospel maintains that *"...we don't have to be rich or in perfect physical health to please God. Praise be to God!"* (D B Mumford 2012:141; emphasis added).

The main question regarding the Prosperity Gospel has been gleaned as the following: Is the issue of rich and poor to be solved by way of the P G or has the church a different missiological task regarding the poor? Is the P G a new kind of mission of God? Or is a specialised missionary approach, inspired by the gospel of Christ, necessary regarding the poor? What is the comprehensive missionary task of the church following the *missio Dei*? These questions have to be confronted in the final chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE GOSPEL AND POVERTY IN A MISSIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Christ provides abundance, but rejects accumulation of riches**

### **THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE GOSPEL AND THE “PROSPERITY GOSPEL” WITH POVERTY**

In the light of the above research regarding the validity of the Prosperity Gospel over against the traditional gospel, revealing basic flaws in the contents and the approaches of the Prosperity Gospel, the question is to be asked and answered what the principal purpose of the Prosperity Gospel is. It has become clear that the goal of the Prosperity Gospel is to proclaim God's will as abundant prosperity for Christians, who believe in God's promises regarding excessive riches for them to receive it under certain conditions, for example, to “name and claim” it, to make excessive contributions to these Prosperity Churches and their representatives as “seed money”, to receive abundant riches in return, and so on. The result of this approach is that it made a comprehensive claim especially on the poor as they saw this as a positive and God-given solution to their dire situation. Consequently, the Prosperity Gospel found a great attraction on the poor masses, in the US but also especially in Africa with their calamitous poverty situations. The authenticity of the Prosperity Gospel in this regard has been invalidated in the thesis.

What remains to be researched is the relationship of the gospel with poverty in the light of the above conclusion. What is the mission of the church regarding poor people? There are even more basic questions to be asked and answers to be provided as far as possible: What is the fundamental missiological task of the church, also regarding poverty? In addition, what is to be seen as the description of poor people? These and similar questions are to be researched in this chapter.



## 6.1 DIFFERENT EMPHASES TO APPROACHES IN MISSION DURING THE PAST DECADES

During the past century there were numerous approaches in the mission of the church: One of the most important aspects of mission and the church that was emphasised in mission was that the church was not in the centre of attention and this was the forerunner of the ecumenical consensus on mission as *missio Dei* towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following is a short description of the most important approaches to mission in recent times regarding the “de-emphasis” on the church:

- Kraemer worked under the influence of the theology of Barth and influenced mission to become extrovert as church action. He understood mission as a calling of the church *to move outside the church* towards confronting the world and society with the reign or kingdom of God. He regarded the church as too much concentrated on itself and not focused on the needs and predicaments of the world and society. He proclaimed a new orientation of the church, concentrating on the needs, destitution and hardships of the world, calling it “mission and service”. The church is not to be a static, self-contained and self-serving body, but the church has “marching orders” from God into the world, saving, serving, healing, assisting and renewing people (Kraemer, H. 1936:15).
- Van Ruler worked from the all-embracing concept of the reign or kingdom of God. He regarded the reign of God as the revelation of God in the world through Christ and especially the Holy Spirit, infiltrating the lives of people and their societies, politically, economically and culturally. Mission is regarded as the proclamation of the reign of God in every new era and society. Mission is an enhancing of God’s action in the world, using his church – claiming the mission of God as the essence of the church.

Van Ruler emphasised a Christian cultural vision of the reign of God – a Christianising of the structures of society towards liberation according to the justice of God. He claims the whole nation for Christ by way of mission as the coming of God's reign (Van Ruler 1954:15).

- Hoekendijk emphasised God's mission to such an extent that the church stays entirely in the background – the church is only to be an instrument of mission as it is merely a vehicle of the kingdom of God in service of the world. According to him mission is the proclamation of salvation, *kerugma*; the living out of salvation, *koinonia*; and the service of salvation, *diakonia*. Mission is the heart and essence of the church (Hoekendijk 1967). Hoekendijk called the parish system of the church immobile, self-centred and introverted (cf. Bosch 1991:384). Consequently, the church has little more than the character of an “intermezzo” between God and the world.

This approach caused problems for the church as an instrument in God's hand for

mission. It seemed as if the classical slogan, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, outside

the church there is no salvation, was turned into its opposite – inside the church

there is no salvation (cf. Ibid). Hoekendijk, however, maintained the church

throughout his life and said, “..the church is (nothing more, but also nothing

less!) than a means in God's hand to establish *shalom* in this world” (1967:22).

This “de-emphasis” of the church as the central figure in mission had all kinds of developments in mission, which have to be delineated.

## 6.2 A CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPORARY MISSION: THE CHURCH IN SERVICE OF GOD'S MISSION

The concept of mission in the thesis is *not* confined to projects involving overseas travel to “un-Christian” people, or directed exclusively to “saving souls” and the “planting of churches”; it is much wider and more comprehensive.

Towards the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it became very difficult to conceptualise mission as it became virtually impossible to describe it under a general rubric, a synopsis accepted by everybody. We have to imagine a new vision of mission and not capture mission in a truncated way, diminishing it to a one-dimensional task. Mission is rather to be regarded as “pluri-verse of missiology in a universe of mission” (Soares-Prabhu; cf. Bosch 1991:2-3). *It is not the church which undertakes mission; it is the missio Dei, the mission of God, which constitutes the church and its tasks.*

Consequently, we have a dilemma with the description of mission: On the one hand we have to conceptualise it and characterise it, and on the other hand, we cannot demarcate it narrowly to be accepted by all the churches. Bosch warns us not to try to “...delineate mission too sharply and too self-confidently. Ultimately, mission remains indefinable...the most we can hope for is to formulate some *approximations* of what mission is all about” (Bosch 1991:9).

If we only look at a short list of how mission is described, we have to agree with Bosch:

- The mission of the church is evangelism alone: “This world is a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can’”
- God’s mission is to establish *Shalom*, peace in the world and the church is to support his work in mission to renew society (WCC, Uppsala, 1968)

- Christ has a kingdom, and his kingship must be proclaimed to all people who have been redeemed by him (William Carey)
- Mission is the planting of the Church in every country and among every people (Roman Catholicism)
- Mission is the witness of the whole church, bringing the whole gospel to the whole world (Commission for World Mission and Evangelism, 1968)
- Mission is the global outreach of the global people of a global God (Chris Wright); (cf. Bowen 1996:71-72; Le Roux, 2011:71-72).

Christian mission is regarded as an inclusive complex of activities aimed at the coming of the reign of God in the world. Christ said, seek first the reign of God and its righteousness. The mission of the church is to support God's mission in the world and in history. Mission includes evangelism, to guide people to accept Christ as Saviour, but it is also much wider. Mission is the cutting edge of the task of the church, expressing a way of life that refuses to accept the *status quo*, and keeps on to attempt to change it according to God's justice, towards the coming of God's reign in society (cf. Kritzinger, 2003:543).

In Christian mission, which is basically to support God's mission of salvation and liberation in the world, and which is the major tenor of theology and the heart of all churches in society, there are two basic approaches:

The *conversion approach* and the *liberation approach*. These two are like the two wings of a bird – they operate in tandem. It is disastrous, as in most churches, if one side is defunct or non-operational.

Usually, unfortunately, most churches, if not basically all churches, are only emphasising personal salvation and try to do a small deal of social work, poverty alleviation, support of people with substance abuse, etc., which is of course

important, but it does not transform the plight of the masses who are kept in bondage of exploitation, domination and poverty.

The other wing of mission and theology is *structural liberation*, communal commitment to structural change and societal transformation. Here, the churches in South Africa at present, disastrously, as in the past, hopelessly try “to fly with one crooked wing”. They are not seeking justice in society through the reign of God; they are not the light of the world and the salt of the earth, liberating the poor, uplifting the downtrodden, empowering the disadvantaged; yes, enabling the setting free of those in bondage. They are not prophesying and acting out life in a dangerous society where 57 are murdered daily in South Africa, and seeking hope in action for the hopeless by assisting to transform society, politically, economically and educationally.

Bosch (1991c:150) described mission as a holistic approach: “Mission also involves making believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognise injustice, suffering, oppression, and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside, carrying a message of hope and new life into a situation of desperate poverty, meaninglessness, and violence, and working for reconciliation and reconstruction.” Consequently, mission is regarded as a wide spectrum of activities: Mission is described as a multifaceted ministry: “Mission as...” Mission as witness, as service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualisation, and a great deal more (cf. Kritzinger and Saayman 2011:174-175).

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a consensus came about regarding the concept of mission as the church participating in God’s mission, *missio Dei*, as a holistic endeavour. *This also emphasised not only the intimate and close interconnection of mission and church, but the inseparable and indissoluble existence of mission and*

*church, as every part of New Testament was written as a missionary document in a missionary context.*

Consequently, the theological understanding of the church as the reaching out of the church from the “Christian” West to the non-Christian world was replaced by this new ecumenical consensus. The most important modification was that mission was no longer regarded as a church venture in obedience to the gospel – mission was now to be understood as a function of the Trinitarian economy or efficiency of salvation: The Father sending the Son, and their sending of the Spirit. God’s mission, *mission Dei*, aims at the saving and restoration of people and all of creation. This mission incorporates the church in all its facets (cf. Neder-Heitmann, 2009:25).

Consequently, the doctrine, the belief about the church, ecclesiology, does not precede missiology, but rather, *missiology precedes ecclesiology*: A community of Christians does not first create a church and then develops its mission; a community of Christians participates in God’s mission and thus constitutes a church (cf. Kritzinger&Saayman on Bosch’ contribution 2011:113).

In addition, a new “missional paradigm” for the church is the “pro-culture” approach of the “emerging churches” in that they actively strive to reach the postmodern generation within their own culture. They follow Bosch (1991:190-191) as they understand the Christian faith as “*intrinsically incarnating*”. “Unless the church chooses to remain a foreign entity, it will always enter into the context that it finds itself in. Furthermore, emerging churches claim that most of the practices of mainline churches are solidified incarnating cultural adaptations of the gospel that were made in the past” (Nel 2009:39). Emerging churches can only be understood in terms of their strong missional orientation in that they seek to discover “what God is doing in the world” to participate in this with him (cf. Niemandt 2007:542; McKnight 2006:19; Nel 2009:40).

This new missional approach is important and has to be delineated in another context as it is not here fully relevant for the topic of the thesis. The main argument of the thesis is that the church is seen to have become a servant in the *missio Dei*, as the main characteristic of the church as missional church, also to endeavour to transform society, politics and economics towards justice to the poor.

### 6.3 MISSION AND POVERTY

The thematic topic of the thesis regarding the Prosperity Gospel and the attraction of the poor to the church as “a kind” of mission calls for an evaluation of poverty and culminates in the missional task of the church in service of God’s mission regarding the poor.

To be able to understand the concept of mission to the poor or in the framework of the poor the notion of poverty has to be understood. Although we normally recognise poverty when we observe it, it remains problematic to characterise it in universal terms and virtually impossible to describe it in terms of figures and financial concepts. Consequently, many of our past efforts to improve living conditions failed “because of our inadequate characterisation” of the poverty problem (cf. Van Niekerk 2002:119-128; Knoetze, H 2009:52).

Poverty can be described with different perceptions, terms and characterisations – it is vital to try and get a grip on poverty to be able to understand the church’s mission to find out “what God does” and to support his work in God’s mission: “Poverty in Africa is the result of the dysfunctional interaction between complex systems, especially the traditional African world, the modern Western world, and the environment” (Van Niekerk, *ibid*). To be able to comprehend poverty better we can classify poverty according to “absolute poverty” and “relative poverty”:

***Absolute poverty*** is where the next meal, or its absence, could mean the difference between life and death. Approximately 1 billion (1 000 million) people in the world, 20% of the world population, live in this situation facing death every day. Of these 85% live in rural areas, mostly in the so-called Third World (cf. Swanepoel & De Beer 2006:3; Knoetze 2009:52-53).

***Relative poverty*** refers to people whose basic needs have been met, but in terms of their social environment and conditions they still experience severe problems and disadvantages.

Poverty can be described in terms of deprivation and the “deprivation trap”, keeping people from improving their lives by referring to shelter, employment, or lack of employment, problems regarding water, sewage, drainage and health facilities.

Clusters of problems influence one another:

- Powerlessness leads to poverty, and poverty leads to powerlessness
- Physical weakness leads to vulnerability and vulnerability leads to physical weakness
- Isolation leads to poverty and poverty leads to isolation, etc. (cf. Chambers 1983:111; Knoetze 2009: 53).

Poverty can be depicted *in terms of ill-being*, the suffering poor, and on the other side, *wellbeing*. This is not only the same as the lack of funds. The condition of ill-being can be expressed in many dimensions, material lack and want, physical ill-being, dreadful social relations, insecurity, vulnerability, worry and fear, powerlessness, frustration, lack of education and training, helplessness and anger. On the other hand, *wellbeing* can be measured by a couple of different dimensions, bodily wellbeing, security, freedom, social wellbeing, education, training and a choice of action (cf. Swanepoel & De Beer 2006:8; Knoetze 2009:53).



Despite the extreme difficulty to measure poverty in terms of monetary standards there are endeavours to determine a breadline or poverty line which can be expressed in monetary terms. The poverty line is a cut-off point above which people can maintain a minimum standard of living, but below which this is not possible. These monetary terms represent the monetary value of consumption rather than the actual expenses. One poverty line classifies households spending less than R353 per month per adult equivalent as poor, and less than R194 per adult equivalent as ultra-poor or destitute (cf. Pieterse 2004:30).

Using the poverty line, the situation in South Africa is calamitous indeed:

Approximately 50% of the population, which is approximately 25 million people, are classified as poor, and 27% of the population, approximately 14 million people are classified as ultra-poor, virtually one out of every three people. According to his definition Pieterse (2004:33) breaks down the poverty data of “population groups”: “African 60.7%, Coloured 38.2%, Indian 5.4%, White 1.0%.”

In South Africa 3 out of every 5 children live in impoverished households in horrific circumstances. They are subject to all kinds of maltreatment and abuse, apart from poverty suffering: Sexual abuse and daughters forced into prostitution, broken and unstable homes, alcohol abuse, insufficient care or protection, exposure to violence, retarded physical and mental development, etc., (cf. Pieterse 2004:35).

The global context is even more horrific:

- 1 billion (1 000 million) people live in dire poverty
- 2 billion people do not have clean or adequate water
- 814 million people are illiterate

- The life expectancy of 1.7 billion people is less than 60 years – most die around the age of 45 if they do not incur fatal illnesses before the time (cf. Theron 1992:186; Pieterse 2004:30).

A crucial aspect of poverty is that society is divided between the poor, the ill-being, the uneducated and untrained, and the powerless on the one side, and the wellbeing, the educated and trained, and powerful, on the other – *the church is to stand in this gap* and proclaim and act towards first seeking the reign of God and its political and economic justice in society (cf. Van der Watt 2009:73). The church often “...expresses a *theologia crucis* of Christian awkwardness...and disengaging from dominant cultures..., a community of presence with the poor and the weak, creating generosity to those on the edges of society” (cf. Muller 2008:58; Van der Watt 2009:76). In Matt. 5 Jesus called his disciples to embody God’s compassion towards the poor as Christ identified himself with them as the prophet Isaiah prophesised, fulfilled by Christ with the significant conclusion : “In his name the nations will put their hope” (Is. 42:1-4); (cf. Combrinck 2009:87). Here, there is no triumphant proclaiming of vast riches for the Christians by the Prosperity Gospel, but only a call for a compassionate heart, prayer and action on the part of Christians for those in dire need.

As conclusion of the thesis it is vital to proclaim the gospel of mission regarding the poor:

*“The mission of God...encompasses secular responsibility. God wants us to carry his redemptive concern into all corners of the world in which we live and on which we depend. Our God has no favourites. He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on righteousness and the unrighteous...When confronted with economic problems, they have to enter the economic discourse on the basis of observation and reason and act redemptively in this context. But they should do so in*

responsibility to God, and *in solidarity* with all affective members of the human family...” Nurnberger 1998b:240; emphasis added).

#### 6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POSSIBLE FURTHER RESEARCH AND STUDY

At the close of the study it is important to delineate possible further fields of study and research regarding Mission, Poverty and the Prosperity Gospel:

- *A more refined search would be important to determine the spiritual and material difference between rich and poor in the contemporary situation: It would include questions, for example, when does abundance in riches as a legitimate blessing from God become accumulation of wealth in the face of the dire poverty in the South African society? How far do the state and the “rich” people have to go to support the poor people without employment and a lack of income? What would be a fair Christian norm for rich churches to discern financial support for the propagation of the gospel and spiritual work vis-à-vis poverty-stricken communities?*
- A detailed study and research would be vital to determine a comprehensive overview of the gospel regarding the preaching of trusting Christ for abundance for one’s church and ourselves, and for provision and care, as well as personal and social structural change to support the poor towards wellbeing.
- An in-depth study of mission regarding poverty and the church’s missionary task regarding the poor in a missionary context. In the light of the multiplicity of missionary approaches of recent times; it could well be: *Mission as poverty alleviation in the light of the deprivation of people in the modern trend of capitalist globalization and political oppression*, even with a so-called democracy where people are not determining their lives actively in everyday social affairs.

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